'CIRCE AMONG CITIES':

IMAGES OF LONDON AND THE LANGUAGES OF SOCIAL CONCERN, 1880 - 1900

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an investigation of sociological, documentary and literary texts whose central concerns are the social conditions in London during the period 1880-1899. London is chosen as a focus because during this time it was perceived as being in a state of crisis which produced an unprecedented amount of writing in response.

The investigation has two complementary objectives:

(i) to analyse, through the changing presentation of London in literary texts, the response of novelists working within the realistic tradition to the challenge of divesting language and form of inherited social meanings;

(ii) to ascertain how conditions in London were articulated in a wide range of non-fictional writings, and to assess the role played by discourses inherited from Christian perspectives of society in absorbing, hindering, expressing or developing radical thought.

The first part of the thesis will establish what the dominant images of London were. It will concentrate on the inner city texts of the 1880s and the suburban texts of the 1890s. What these images reveal about changing moral and political responses to social issues are assessed.

The second part will be concerned with a London of spiritual and moral significance. Certain doctrinal, sociological and fictional works which attempted to make Christian terminology appropriate to the contemporary city will be considered. The impact of Socialism on religious and fictional discourses is evaluated.

The thesis will conclude with a discussion of London as a political construct and assess how far such a perception sets up a break with tradition. Fictional texts assume a peculiar importance here since they are strongly differentiated from each other and from their literary tradition.

In fictional texts in particular, images of London highlight the particular difficulty of redeploying a tradition of realism to accommodate radical ideas and the consequent formal challenges. The presentation of London in a diverse body of literature can therefore be seen to offer a variety of perspectives on the process of change in both language and form.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Clementina Black, An Agitator
ALL	Walter Besant, All Sorts and Conditions of Men
BC	Andrew Mearns, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London
BCS	A. Conan Doyle, Beyond the City
CG	Margaret Harkness, A City Girl
CL	Margaret Harkness, Captain Lobe
DE	William Booth, In Darkest England and The Way Out
HPL	George Sims, How The Poor Live and Horrible London
Letters	The Letters Of George Gissing to Members of his Family
LCS	Percy Fitzgerald, London City Suburbs as They are Today
LDL	A.O. Jay, Life In Darkest London
LEL	Stewart Headlam, The Laws of Eternal Life
LLP1	C. Booth, Labour and Life of the People. London (East)
LP	A.P. Foulkes, Literature and Propaganda
MEW	Constance Howell, A More Excellent Way
NGS	George Gissing, New Grub Street
NNL	Richard Jefferies, Nature Near London
NW	George Gissing, The Nether World
ODW	George Gissing, The Odd Women
OR	William Pett Ridge, Outside the Radius
OW	Margaret Harkness, Out of Work
RAL	Robert Buchanan, The Reverend Annabel Lee
RE	Mrs Humphr y Ward, Robert Elsmere
RES	W.J. Dawson, The Redemption of Edward Strahan
SH	Stewart Headlam, The Service of Humanity
SHL	W. Spencer Clarke, The Suburban Homes of London
SP	A.O. Jay, The Social Problem
SR	James Adderley, Stephen Remarx
SS	A.O. Jay, A Story of Shoreditch
TH	George Gissing, Thyrza
TTS	Arthur Mee, 'The Transformation in Slumland'
VC	Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities

INTRODUCTION

Section 1

This thesis examines a wide range of writing about London produced between 1880 and 1900. The texts I am concerned with are works of sociology, religion and politics as well as fiction. These texts all focus on London, either directly by commenting on the social problems of poverty, unemployment and housing, or indirectly by registering reactions to these problems. I have chosen writings about late Victorian London as the focus of my investigation because this was a time and a place when society perceived itself to be in a state of radical change, generating social analysis and commentary on an unprecedented scale.1 The extent and variety of the writings which emerged in response to a widespread sense of social crisis provide a wealth of appropriate material.

My purpose is to ascertain how the issues and responses inspired by contemporary social problems were articulated. My investigation is based on two premises. The first is Georg Lukács' proposition that 'form problems are determined by the problems of content'.2 The second is A.P.

Foulkes' complementary but broader proposition, that 'language in its social context reflects and transmits ideology'.3 I will assess the implications of these statements for different kinds of writing, all of which shared the difficulty of trying to reflect or to initiate social change. In particular, I will assess the role played by vocabularies derived from Christian and Socialist perspectives in inhibiting or facilitating the expression of radical ideas.

Section 2

LONDON: 1880 - 1900

Three aspects of contemporary public opinion as it reveals itself in the writings I discuss directly inform the context of my thesis. The validity of these opinions is, I should stress, irrelevant to my argument. What I am concerned with is individual perceptions of the state of society. This is in itself a form of historical reality, and there can be no doubt, that for most of the 1880s, society was in a state of considerable tension and unease.

Firstly, these writings convey a sense that London's growth was out of control. The sheer size of the city was the single most important factor into which all other problems fed.4 This growth took place in the most influential and richest city in the world, and yet it was

accompanied by an equally rapid growth in poverty and unemployment.5 The extent and horror of the slums and of social conditions were unparallel ed in urban history. It was not only Londoners who were aware of this. Contemporary observers from Europe and America agreed that the squalor of London's conditions was equalled nowhere else in the world. The city limits were also seen as having broken down as new developments spread across the surrounding countryside.6 In 1915 the urban planner, Patrick Geddes, conveyed the threat perceived in the process that had taken place when he described London's growth as like an 'octopus ...polypus rather... perhaps likest to the spreadings of a great coral reef'.7

A second important contextual factor is the scale of public response to information about social conditions. As the facts accumulated they generated a terrifying sense of threat and danger. While social and urban commentators as well as many novelists had been aware of the problems for some time, collective awareness of those living in London of what was happening appears to have been suddenly activated in the early 1880s. Andrew Mearns' pamphlet on housing conditions, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London (1883) certainly acted as a powerful catalyst in focusing public attention.8 At its most dramatic, this awareness manifested itself as vague fears of the imminent collapse of civilisation and a return to barbarism. This sense of instability was focused initially on the unknown nature of the massed numbers of poor who were lurking somewhere in

London worse 'than the uncleanest of brute beasts'. (BC 69) Many feared that they would rise up and plunge London back into another Dark Age.

Lurking behind this fear of the masses and substantiating its reality were other, older fears. One was informed by Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest. On the Origin of Species was published in 1859 and had been variously interpreted over the intervening years in attempts to understand and explain its applicability to human social organisation. The publication of The Descent of Man (1871) had added fuel to the debates. Public opinion found itself caught between two major schools of thought. On the one hand there was Spencerian 'optimism', which argued that competition in society reflected biological processes; that a high mortality rate among the poor ensured a healthy future society and that any interference put a 'stop to that natural process of elimination by which society continually purifies itself'.9 On the other hand T.H. Huxley argued that 'Our reverence for the nobility of manhood will not be lessened by the knowledge that Man is, in substance and structure, one with the brutes'. This, he maintained, was because intellectual evolution was as significant as physical evolution and could help man to combat purely brute forces.10 However, both these positions were based on the assumption that these brute forces did exist in people and that civilisation was actually little more than a thin veneer. Information that the physical condition of immigrants from the countryside rapidly deteriorated in the

city exacerbated such fears and fostered a belief in the degenerative characteristics of urban living.11

Another fear was that the constraining moral influence of Christianity had been undermined and was retreating before the invasion of materialist and scientific world - views such as Darwinism, and more latterly, Anarchism and Socialism. Membership of the National Secular Society reached its peak in 1885. Charles Bradlaugh's well documented fight to enter Parliament without taking a Christian oath provides a convenient historical marker for the legitimisation of Atheism.12 In 1881 H.M. Hyndman founded the first public organisation for the dissemination of Marxist ideas, and Marx' Das Kapital first appeared in an English translation in 1886. The ideas of Positivism, August Comte's exposition of a humanist religion, were also becoming familiar through the work of its English disciple, Frederic Harrison. Christian ethics still underpinned social and political mores and Christians were often instrumental in drawing attention to social issues. Nevertheless, Christianity was perceived as having failed society, and in particular the working classes.13 As rationalism and scientific materialism began increasingly to influence the social debate, the Anglican Church in particular was on the defensive. The fact that the terms Atheism, Anarchy and Socialism rapidly became synonymous and indicative of a generalised sense of threat shows how vague and uninformed but how deep such fears were.

The third and last aspect of this general context is

the fever of social guilt generated by revelations about mortality rates, housing conditions, poverty and disease. This was not simply a matter of perceiving that a wrong had been done that needed to be corrected. Guilt sprang from the slowly gathering recognition that what had been believed to be right - that is, the established structures of social and economic organisation - had produced a horrifying indictment of themselves. The ensuing debate ranged over broad sociological and political issues from the effects of State interference to the immediately practical need for slum clearance and protective housing and employment legislation. All arguments led back to a fundamental question that inserted itself painfully into the consciousness of a middle class made comfortable by the inequalities created by a free market economy - the nature of individual reponsibility and its relationship to social and State responsibility.

By the 1890s the public perception of social problems had begun to shift as society struggled to absorb and integrate the ideas they had generated. While the broad areas of concern remained the same as in the 1880s, perspectives on them were changing.

Particularly notable were changes in the attitudes to the working classes. Whereas the poor, the 'submerged tenth' had dominated the debates of the 1880s, by the 1890s, there was a new consciousness of the 'working classes'. Interest had been focused on working conditions by the Match Girls' Strike in 1888, and on the rise of the New Unionism - that is, the rights to union organisation demanded by an

unskilled casual labour force - by the Great Dock Strike of 1889. The working classes were perceived to be in the process of transformation from an unknown, unnumbered threat into a political force, first to be reckoned with and then later, to be courted and integrated.

The rise of Socialism as a organised political force obviously played its part here, but the significance of the role it was accredited by public opinion in the 1880s was much greater than the power it was actually able to wield. In the 1890s, Marxist theory, which a few years earlier had fuelled fears of a social revolution, became marginalised by forms of moral Socialism.

> If, as was said, half in jest and half in earnest, 'we are all Socialists now', it is also true that Socialism means anything or everything...14

commented Frederic Harrison on the diffusion of the Socialist threat. Socialism became a fashion - it was loved and hated, argued about, flirted with and finally legitimised as the ideological base of a political party. Arguably, its most significant contribution to the changing of attitudes was the permeation by its materialist world-view of Christian social ethics. Socialism provided the language to articulate the conclusions reached independently by social commentators and slum priests, and it provoked the Church into reassessing the meaning of its spiritual role.15

Perceptions of London's growth also changed. Planning became a keyword in discussions of suburban developments and of transport systems to service them. Whether for better or

worse, this appeared to be evidence of a newly emergent role for Socialist inspired State intervention. Yet many of those who moved to the suburbs became part of a reactionary ethos based on individualism. James Cornford, in his study of Tory voting patterns during the 1880s and 1890s notes the identification of the suburbs with conservatism. This tendency was consolidated rather than undermined by the outpouring into the rural outskirts of London of tradesmen and clerical employees who chose to identify with the middle classes and vote for the parties 'whose political dialogue is not couched in the language of the class struggle'.16 The new threat became the aspirations of the working classes to middle class status, and the perceived pressure on the middle classes to preserve existing class boundaries.

By the end of the 1890s, London had witnessed radical social changes and a multiplicity of responses to them. Its very name had become virtually synonymous with the movements to which its structures had given birth. 'London' was not only a topographical location beset by an extraordinary set of social problems, but an arena of debate where the concepts of Atheism, Humanism, Marxism, Anarchism, and Secularism were materialised. 'London', always a unique phenomenon, assumed in the course of these twenty years a kind of mythological status, an amorphous unknowable but vital identity that transcended its material, concrete existence.

Section 3

London in Literature

London not only provides the subject matter for the body of literature discussed in this thesis, it also provides a system for its critical methodology. The presentation of London in that literature offers a variety of answers to the central question about the process of change in form and language. Therefore, the structure of the thesis is not linear, but seeks what Ruskin called 'Truth in mosaic'.

Chapters 1 and 2 establish what the dominant images of London were (i) in documentary and sociological texts and (ii) in fictional texts of the 1880s. The material deals exclusively with inner London and the East End slums. Chapters 3 and 4 shift ground chronologically and topographically to concentrate on writings about the London suburbs of the 1890s. What these images reveal collectively about moral and political responses to the great social issues is assessed. Both the reactionary and the radical responses identified in non-fictional texts are related to the subversive or integrationist processes of realistic fiction.

Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with the first of the two most dominant groups of images of London to emerge from this analysis: London as a city of spiritual and moral potential. In Chapter 5 certain doctrinal and sociological

works which attempted to make Christian terminology appropriate to the contemporary city are considered. Chapter 6 discusses the texts that gave a fictional form to these issues. This discussion analyses how Christian terminology, which had evolved an effective expression of spiritual concerns, sought to construct the received image of an eschatological and divine city of Jerusalem in the concrete terms of temporal London. The essential continuity of orthodox Christian ideas emerges, despite the challenge that these texts make to them.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the second of the two groups of images: the city as a political construct. This reveals an oppositional voice informed by a Socialist perspective and represents a break with tradition. Sociological and documentary material diminishes in importance since its concerns are either more broadly ideological than specifically urban, or its discourse is self-consciously socialist. Fictional texts, on the other hand, assume a greater importance. Although the body of work is much smaller than those of slum realism and religious novels, individual texts are more strongly differentiated from each other and from their literary tradition. Chapter 7 considers the problem of redeploying an established tradition of realism in the materialising of London's political structures and describes some of the strategies adopted by selected novelists to do this.

Section 4

In my discussion I use two terms - 'literature' and 'traditional modes of expression' - which require contextual definition.

Literature

By 'literature' I mean the body of texts whose central concern was commentary on or analysis of London's social problems. These are sociological, historical, religious and political commentaries as well as fictional texts. The discourses of these non-fictional texts are, I believe, as available and relevant to linguistic analysis as the discourse of fiction. The separateness and the peculiar contribution of any one of these discourses is able to be appreciated precisely because of its relational nature. As Colin Mercer argues:

> ...it is not the object 'literature' which is the point of analysis, but the relationships between literature as a 'symbolic form' and other forms of signification: political, scholastic, ideological and so on.17

Such an approach within a relational series implies, I believe, an undifferentiated investigation of fictional and non-fictional texts in which the importance of individual writers and individual texts will be evaluated by what they reveal of the discourse they employ.

The notion that fictional texts are a superior version of language and that literary criticism is a discrete

activity is, I would suggest, not appropriate to my purpose. Late Victorian writers themselves did not consider the boundaries of discourse to be rigidly fixed. C.F.G. Masterman cited five categories of 'literature' other than fiction which he considered appropriate to an investigation of the unwritten history of working class consciousness.18 It was Charles Booth, who as a statistician claimed to avoid metaphor, who described London as 'The Circe among cities'. (LLP1 554) Similarly, it has been noted that :

> The classical writings of urban sociology are more closely comparable with those of the poets, the novelists, the social commentators of the nineteenth century...than...their successors in the social sciences.19

Equally, many of the novelists whom I discuss drew as consciously on sociological, political and religious discourse as on literary discourse. The novels, therefore, offer themselves to a variety of readings which sometimes reinforce/s and sometimes counterpoint/s the readings of other non-fictional texts. In this sense, not only are the narratives rooted in historical and sociological reference, but the texts have a specific historicity of their own. Once the critic acknowledges the historicity of literary texts, any perceived hierarchical distinction between them and documentary or commentating texts begins to blur. At this point it becomes more important to establish the mode of perception through which the text was received. By this, I do not mean to imply that the historical perception of a text should fix or delimit its meaning:

> ... but it does suggest that fictionality is a relative historical category which should

> be explained in terms of reception rather than textual structure. A text may seem to be able to signal fictionality, but it achieves this only when its receivers are subject to a set of shared conventions. (LP 73)

Nevertheless, I want to emphasise that fictional texts make a different and distinctive contribution from non-fictional texts to the understanding of language. There are three differences that are significant for my thesis. The first is that the novelist's chief concern is not simply with meaning itself, but with giving form to meaning. It is, therefore, the peculiar interest of fictional texts that they are often those which achieve the very clear and powerful expression which can indicate a culmination, a moment of crystallisation, in the history of a particular idea. However, because novelists work from a consciousness of language, style and structure, they are also more likely than non-fiction writers to transcend or replace inadequacies and failures of expression and form. For this reason I have concentrated on those writers who chose the novel form primarily because it was seen as the most effective means of communicating a specific social message. The comparative lack of formal sophistication these novelists show makes potential tensions between theme, language and form more accessible to the critic. One exception to this criterion for selection is the work of George Gissing. His novels span the years 1881 to 1900 and beyond, and are used to provide a counterpointing aesthetic to the work of more popular novelists.

Secondly, fictional texts have greater importance than

non-fictional texts in consolidating attitudinal changes. P.J. Keating's claim of these Victorian novels that '...the fictional response trails behind the political and social reform movements' is largely true.20 However, although most of the novels I discuss were written in reaction to specific events or the gathering tide of public opinion, their greater public impact gave them wider currency and more influence than equivalent commentaries or documentaries, with one or two notable exceptions. This is because imaginative writing tends to focus the significance of factual information, the spirit of an argument, or the thrust of an ideology through metaphorical networks.

It was recognition of this power that led many religious and political writers to adopt the novel form. Mrs Humphrey Ward acknowledged this fact when she commented about the writing of her best known novel, Robert Elsmere, that :

> ...I was determined to deal with it so [in a novel], in order to reach the public....And it seemed to me that the novel was capable of holding and shaping real experience of any kind, as it affects the lives of men and women. It is the most elastic, the most adaptable of forms.21

Thirdly, the power the novel has to evoke an appropriate and memorable emotional response through symbols gives it a capacity to combat integrative processes. This power can be used to reorganise what is familiar into a new paradigm of consciousness, and to create a new set of symbols which will displace those with inherited power. Conversely, it is true that this power invests in fictional

texts which enter the sociological, political and religious arenas, a potentially integrative role that can render them little more than propaganda. But although fictional texts will not necessarily be at the cutting edge of the generation of ideas, they can choose to be at the cutting edge of language if they wish to articulate or provoke changes in consciousness. Indeed:

> The power of language to construct a particular social reality can be challenged in fiction precisely because of fiction's ability not merely to question analytically, but to present through language a totally different vision of possible social formations. (LP 40)

Traditional Modes of Expression

What is perceived as traditional varies according to social and historical contexts. In making 1880 the starting point of my investigation, I am also attempting to fix a point in public language and literary form from which changes can be measured relationally. For my purpose I shall call 'traditional' what was accepted and used as familiar in terminology and literary form at the beginning of the 1880s.

I recognise three distinct elements in the discussion based on the premise of 'traditional modes of expression'. The first is the collective voice of State and Church as it is reflected in the economic, social and moral structures through which society was organised. I link Church with State since it was the fusion of these two powers which created the distinctive voice of socio-ethics that most

concerns me in its role as the mediator of urban conditions.22 Here were set up the conditions for potential conflict between institutionalised authority and individual perception.

The second is the individual voice of dissent. If we accept Foulkes' argument that language reflects and transmits ideology, then we must also accept that concurrent with the acquisition of language comes the absorption of modes of perception and of value systems endorsed and legitimised by the structures of power. However, over these fundamental and unconsciously acquired meanings play immediate and instant impressions which are allowed temporary oppositional space. For the individual this sets up a linguistic dialectic. On the one hand the individual is vulnerable to the integrative processes of acquired language. As Foulkes argues :

> ...to the extent that its [language] acquisition leads a person to believe that his individuality is an essence, to be expressed through language, rather than the product of a given culture, it will have succeeded in playing its first trick. (LP 38)

Yet, on the other hand, the boundaries of that language are 'in a constant state of flux and redefinition'. It is on these boundaries that the dissent of individuals can set up the conditions for change, and where the displaced voice of tradition becomes what Frederic Jameson in his analysis of the ideology of narrative calls 'sedimented content'.23

The third element concerns literary forms, in which it can also be recognised that 'specific world-views bring specific forms with them'.24 The most familiar forms that

the social problem novelists of the 1880s had at their disposal were heavily dominated by narrative. Some were mere homiletic tales; some were more overtly didactic than others, but common to all was an insistence on narrative resolution and 'moral intensity'.25 As Jameson claims, the narrative form has evolved its own inbuilt imperatives:

> ...the production of...narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions.26

Another closely related aspect of literary tradition in the 1880s which had asserted itself powerfully in the 1840s through the work of Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens, was social realism. All novelists wanting to convey a picture of their society in the 1880s and 1890s used realism in one way or another. However, combined with the tradition of a narrative resolution based on morality, realism had become yet another integrating structure that reflected society as those in power wished to see it or that those reading wished it to be. The French school of Naturalism, ushered in by Emile Zola and a strong influence on George Gissing among others, was heavily criticised for its 'dark pessimism', and always remained alien to popular taste in England. In other words the nature of fictional realism was defined as much by its mode of reception as its mode of production.

However, it was only through these accepted versions of realism and narrative structure that novelists could embark on the mission they had set themselves - to influence and

change their society. Where those forms became dislocated, at odds with or detached from apparent meaning, that is where the novelist who found that 'form problems' were indeed 'determined by the problems of content', was given the opportunity to push the boundaries outwards and give sanction to new language and new forms.

Section 5

I have been particularly helped in my thinking about London and language by the work of three modern sociologists: Harold Pfautz' analysis of the work of Charles Booth in Booth: On the City (1968); Maurice Ash, A Guide to the Structure of London (1972) and David Harvey, Social Justice and the City (1973).27 From Pfautz, and from John Goode's interpretation of his work in relation to George Gissing's novels, I have learned how realistic narrative can use the facts which describe urban structures as a metaphorical network to reveal their determining effect on human consciousness.

Maurice Ash confirmed my sense that individuals use the material reality of London to substantiate personal identity. This has given me confidence to work on the premise that the images foregrounded by peoples' perception of London's development conceal another historical process at work - the making of a consciousness. Ash claims that:

> ...the entity of London is a fiction. And yet, that London exists in its own right is a reality of discourse to which we are always

brought back.

and that this is:

> ...not least because we understand ourselves, we each find our own identity in terms of the fixed marks of everyday life .... And the difficulty of finding ourselves is becoming obsessive as the mobility from which we otherwise profit increases.28

Finally, David Harvey's iconoclastic approach to modern urban theory has strengthened my own conviction of Victorian London as a nexus of textual equality. He attributes the failure of urban sociology to establish an adequate critique of modern society to the maintenance of separate academic disciplines and the consequent proliferation of partial viewpoints. Refusing to synthesize the totality of our information into what he calls 'powerful patterns of thought':

> ... renders much of the academic community impotent, for it traps us into thinking that we can understand reality only through a synthesis of what each discipline has to say...29

London, in the demands it made on the language of sociologists, political and religious commentators and novelists, obliges the literary critic to accept the city as a material synthesizer of those discourses. From the literature written about the city, the critic can reconstruct a series of voices and witness the process of profound changes in the expression of contemporary consciousness.

NOTES

1. See in particular Helen M. Lynd, The Eighteen Eighties (London, 1945).

2. Georges Lukacs, cited in Wellek, Four Critics: Croce, Valery, Lukacs and Ingarden (Seattle and London, 1981), p. 43.

3. A.P. Foulkes, Literature and Propaganda (London and New York, 1983), p. 6. Afterwards referred to in the text as LP, followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

4. See Asa Briggs, 'The Human Aggregate', in Victorian Cities, edited by Asa Briggs (London, 1963). Afterwards referred to in the text as VC followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

5. For patterns of employment and their relationship to poverty in London see Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London (Oxford, 1971).

6. For a discussion of the extent and nature of suburban development see H.J. Dyos, Victorian Suburb: a Study of the Growth of Camberwell (Leicester, 1961). Foreword by Sir John Summerson. See also Alan A. Jackson, Semi-detached London: Suburban Development, Life and Transport 1900-39. (London, 1973), and Donald J. Olsen, The Growth of Victorian London, (London, 1976).
The increase in London's population was rapid, from 414,000 in 1861, to 1,405,000 in 1901. It was in 1881 that the term 'Greater London' was first officially used.

7. Patrick Geddes, Cities in Evolution (London, 1968), p. 26. First published in 1915.

8. The Reverend Andrew Mearns, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, edited and with an introduction by Anthony S. Wohl (Leicester, 1970). The introduction includes a survey of the political and public response to the pamphlet. Afterwards referred to in the text as BC, followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

9. Herbert Spencer, 'Society Conditioned by Evolution' (1882), in Darwin and Darwinism: Revolutionary Insights concerning Man, Nature, Religion and Society, edited by Harold Y. Vanderpool (London, 1973), p. 205.

10. T.H. Huxley, 'Man and the Lowest Animals', an extract from Man's Place in Nature (1863), in Darwin and Darwinism, edited by Harold Y. Vanderpool, p. 189.

11. Charles Booth, Labour and Life of the People. London (East) (London, 1891), p. 553-554. First published 1889. Afterwards referred to in the text as LLP1 followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations. References to later sections of Charles Booth's survey will be taken from the 1902 revised edition and identified by footnote.
See also, James Cantlie, Degeneration Among Londoners (London, 1888), and N.C. MacNamara, Origin and Character of the British People (1900).

12. See Walter L. Arnstein, The Bradlaugh Case: A Study in Late Victorian Opinions and Politics (Oxford, 1965).

13. Two contemporary religious surveys confirm this. See British Weekly, November - December 1886, and R. Mudie-Smith, editor, The Religious Life of London (London, 1904).

14. Frederic Harrison, Moral and Religious Socialism. A New Year's Address (London, 1891), p. 23.

15. See Stephen Mayor, The Churches and the Labour Movement (London, 1967).

16. James Cornford, 'The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century', Victorian Studies, 7 (September 1965), pp. 35-66 (p. 38). See also Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics', Journal of Social History, 7 (Summer 1974), p. 462 where he argues that working class culture '...was not one of political combativity but of an enclosed and defensive conservatism'.

17. Colin Mercer, 'Paris Match: Marxism, Structuralism, and the Problem of Literature', in Criticism and Critical Theory, edited by Jeremy Hawthorne, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 2 (London, 1984), p. 52.

18. C.G.F. Masterman, The Condition of England (London, 1960), p. 11. First published 1909.

19. J.R.Mellor, Urban Sociology in an Urbanized Society (London, 1977), p. 110.

20. P.J. Keating, The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, (London, 1971), p. 3.

21. Mrs Humphrey Ward, A Writer's Recollections (London, 1918), p. 229.

22. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (London, 1930). First published in 1904.

23. Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London, 1981), p. 99.

24. Georges Lukacs, cited in Rene Wellek, Four Critics, p. 43.

25. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London, 1960), p. 9. First published in 1948.

26. Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious, p. 79.

27. Harold Pfautz, Charles Booth On the City: Physical Pattern and Social Structure (Chicago, 1967), and John Goode, George Gissing: Literature and Ideology (Brighton, 1978).
Maurice Ash, A Guide to the Structure of London (Bath, 1972).
David Harvey, Social Justice and the City (London, 1973).

28. Maurice Ash, A Guide to the Structure of London, p.2 and p. 3.

28. David Harvey, Social Justice and the City, p. 149.

CHAPTER ONE

THE INNER CITY: 'UNINTENDED IRONY' IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL WRITINGS OF GEORGE R. SIMS, ANDREW MEARNS AND CHARLES BOOTH 1882 - 1889

Section 1

'I commence with the first of these chapters, a book of travel', wrote George R. Sims, proceeding to initiate his readers into an exploration of 'a dark continent within easy walking distance of the General Post Office'. This article, the first of a series written for The Pictorial World in 1882-83, was one of the earliest examples of a new surge of urban literature in the 1880s inspired by the pressing social problems created by the growth of London's population, and the rapidly increasing desire to stimulate public awareness of them.1 The typicality of these articles in the issues they raise and the rhetoric they employ, makes them a useful starting point for an investigation of writing about London. They illuminate some of the shifts in attitude created by the need to understand what seemed to be new and threatening phenomena, and often unconsciously reveal aspects of contemporary thought outside an immediately urban

reference.

I do not wish to imply in my discussion that a conscious literary artistry was at work in the writings of Sims, or of Andrew Mearns and Charles Booth, whose work I discuss later, nor that they were deliberately revolutionary in a political sense. Their language would be much less interesting in conveying shifts in thought if their aim were the overturning of the structures they criticised, though this was a very powerful line of contemporary political thinking.2 The interest lies precisely in the fact that men who believed in the value of their church and the power of God as Mearns did; in parliamentary reform, as Sims did, and in the power of rational thought, as Charles Booth did, actually revealed that the language of Church and State no longer adequately expressed people's perception of themselves and their society.

The particular relevance of the work of Sims and Mearns is that they represent different points of view, the first of a popular journalist, the second of an urban missionary, and yet the common ground between them is extensive.3 The rhetoric and strategies they used to convey their message, and the response to their work, give some clue to the prevailing climate of public opinion and the acceptability of their ideas at that time. In contrast is the work of Charles Booth, who was considering the same problems and whose writing confirms the picture conveyed by Sims and Mearns. Yet his aims, and his means of achieving them were radically different. It is in the first two volumes of <u>The</u>

Labour and Life of the People in London, published in 1889, that we can begin to see clearly revealed the inadequacies of moral and social attitudes that Booth's scientific methodology exposes, as well as the foundations for a new understanding of the processes of urbanisation, and their human and political implications.

In this chapter, I will deal first with the work of George Sims which I shall use to explore the ways in which he attempts to describe social issues. I shall then relate this discussion to the broader areas of contemporary concerns which his use of language suggests. Some of these are elaborated on through the work of Andrew Mearns. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the first two volumes of Charles Booth's seventeen volume sociological survey, since they were the only volumes completed and published during the 1880s, and were partly, at least, motivated by the desire to put the horror stories about poverty, disease and death to statistical test. I will consider the common ground between Booth's writing and that of Sims and Mearns, and finally assess the nature of the strain when a language claiming to be scientific and objective attempts to displace a language already heavily weighted with moral and political implications.

Section 2

As the quotation which opens this chapter makes clear, Sims portrayed slum London as an unknown world. The 'continent' explored by Sims is the continent of the poor. The reader is scarcely aware of the vagueness of location since the details are described with a graphic immediacy which suggests intimate kmowledge of the area. Streets and areas are deliberately not specified, which increases the impression of size and strangeness. It served Sims' purpose better to emphasise not the geographical nearness of the slums but the nearness of their potential impact on the secure world of the middle classes:

> Now if you will take the trouble to think out the possible result of girls going from pigsties as these straight into well-to-do families, where they will nurse the children and constantly be in the closest contact with the younger members of the family I think you will see that the dangers of an unhealthy home for the poor may be equally dangerous to a better class. (HPL 59)

The implication that this world is just around the corner carries political overtones, since Sims clearly wishes to arouse his readers' fears in order to motivate a desire for change. Having established the nearness of danger, Sims plays on these fears by accumulating factual details that are particularly horrifying and disturbing, more akin to the familiar elements of a nightmare than reality, and then revealing them to be literal truths.

'Darkness' provides the most pervasive example: 'even the sun ...is foiled [and]... could not force its way

between the overhanging parapets'. (HPL 4) This darkness, caused by building the houses too closely together, and using up garden or yard to erect extra warehouses and workshops, is seen as an act against a beneficent nature. Sims portrays men as creating their own darkness, blocking out the light necessary to healthy growth and living. Those forced to live in these areas had only the 'glitter of the gin-palace' as a physical relief from the darkness of alleys and courts.

The insides of the houses are shown to be a concentration of the darkness in the world outside. To enter them one had to act blindly, to choose 'at hazard an open doorway and plunge into it', braving the blackness with all its dangers. Sims' accounts of his explorations root his anecdotes firmly in the Gothic horror tradition:

> We pass along a greasy, grimy passage, and turn a corner to ascend the stairs. Round the corner it is dark. There is no staircase light, and we can hardly distinguish in the gloom where we are going.... As we ascend we knock accidentally up against something; it is a door and a landing. The door is opened, and as the light is thrown on to where we stand we give an involuntary expression of horror; the door opens right on to the corner stair...if she stepped incautiously, she would fall six feet and nothing would save her. (HPL 12)

'Foul within and foul without', a phrase redolent of moral corruption, is also used to describe this darkened world but is, again, revealed to have a completely literal application. Here, 'it is dangerous to breathe for some hours at a stretch an atmosphere charged with infection and poisoned with indescribable effluvia'. (HPL 12)

Sims also takes pains to emphasise the alien, enclosed nature of this nightmare world. He describes it as an 'Alsatia', his journey as routed through 'Outcasts' Land', and its essence is concentrated in the urban image 'Povertyopolis'. Insistently, like a refrain, he describes the slum dwellers as outcast; 'the starved outcast', 'one-roomed outcasts', and 'modern wanderers in the wilderness'. Yet again, a term charged with moral condemnation takes on a changed power when perceived as a social fact. The life slum-dwellers led made it almost impossible to relate to the practices of worlds outside their own. Marriage, for instance, 'as an institution, is not fashionable in these districts'. When such standards were enforced, their irrelevance was repeatedly proven, as Sims explores in the B Meeting article (HPL 26ff), where the conflict between the demands of the School Board and the demands of wage-earning isillustrated through particular cases. Detached from society's norms, the slum dwellers are shown to perpetuate seemingly ritual crimes of murder, physical violence, prostitution and drunkenness. Sims' accounts of individual lives and difficulties accumulatively become a survey of a lost people.

The isolation is made complete by what Sims perceived as the silence of the slum dwellers; that is, their inability to find a collective voice to express their situation because none of the available languages are appropriate. Communication is reduced to the inarticulate 'oath of the gin-maddened ruffian, the cry of the trampled

wife, and the wail of the terrified child...' (HPL 70) Just as the difference between the underlying assumptions of the classes inhibited understanding, so did the external forms of daily discourse promulgate confusion, as Sims both amusingly and movingly illustrated in a series of encounters between slum dwellers and traditional authority, such as the court hearing referred to above.4

The picture that Sims draws is indeed 'hell upon earth, where day brings no light, and night no rest'; where the inhabitants live' sunk in the lowest abysses of vice and degradation'. It is, in one sense, the realisation of hell in and on the streets of London. However, the appropriateness of the metaphor which makes the city a concrete rather than a spiritual hell, also makes more ambiguous whose responsibility it is that this hell exists - those who are forced to live in it or those who ignore their needs and their existence.

Sims intensifies the impact of his picture by hinting at the existence of a latent power fostered by these conditions of living, a power that he sees as having a dual significance. He exacerbates his readers' fears by portraying the power of the poor as a revolutionary force which could 'burst their barriers' and 'give us a taste of the lesson the mob have tried to teach now and again in Paris.... (HPL 44) More covertly, he appeals to a fundamental terror of chaos, suggesting that in the struggle for survival, the facade of social proprieties could drop away releasing 'only the ferocious instincts of the brute',

and that the type and numbers needed for survival in such a world had put into motion the evolution of a new species:

> ...so thickly do crime and vice and drink and improvidence intertwine and spread themselves over the soil upon the fertilizing juices of which they flourish and grow fouler day by day. (HPL 43)

Sims was first and foremost a powerful and entertaining journalist. The tone of How the Poor Live and Horrible London reveals his awareness of the gap between his level of consciousness and that of the majority of his readers. Shock tactics, humour, polemic and sentiment are all blended to maintain a delicate balance between stirring his readers' social consciences and alienating them. He could not rely on their objectivity, so he appealed to their self-interest. He made the possibility of constructive action feasible by singling out clearly defined areas where some influence could rapidly be brought to bear. It was not only the working classes that needed educating. How the Poor Live was essentially a propagandist document. Sims made no attempt to present a philosophical or ideological case for social change but wrote forcefully from a position of humanitarianism and common sense.

How the Poor Live, however, did draw attention to two strands of thought that were to become increasingly important in shaping the evolution of political thinking as the century drew to a close: that is, its recognition of the revolutionary potential of the poor and of the importance of environment in moulding character. It is possible that Sims' acknowledgement of the former was little more than a stick

to beat the middle classes with, and that his personal commitment was more tied up with the latter position. However, both positions were very soon to become formulated as essential, if sometimes contradictory, elements of Socialist policy in the late 1880s and 1890s.

It is important to recognise that the way Sims felt compelled to describe the realities of London - by consciously amassing a weight of literal, documentary detail - was not sufficient to express his sense of the whole experience. To convey his own sense of horror and to provoke a matching response in his readers, he fell back upon the rhetoric most familiar to himself and to them. But, as Sims recognised, when images of hell, of the survival of the fittest and of jungles and heathens lent themselves naturally to the facts of degradation, neglect and exploitation that London provided, they also appeared to challenge rather than to validate the assumptions that underpinned the stability of Church and State, and demanded a reassessment of society's achievements. Consequently, the modern reader is able to identify in Sims' work, both specific information about London conditions, and related strands of contemporary thought.

The sensitivity of the issues that Sims thrust into the forefront of peoples' consciousness was that they all raised questions about the uniqueness of people and the value of their institutions. This was clearly not an achievement that can be attributed to Sims' work alone. If Sims were an isolated example, the impact would be far less and such a

claim would be hard to substantiate. It is the repetition of similar images across a range of different writings - only a few of which I have the space to consider - that begins to indicate the emergence of new values and criteria.

Section 3

The first of the three most dominant patterns of imagery that pervade Sims' writing is, as I have already indicated, the eschatological. The literal details of his descriptions of London's slum streets and houses were married with such fidelity to the familiar images of hell that the use of them appeared almost inevitable. Such images had by no means lost their power. Hell was still very much a live issue even in late Victorian theological discourse. Though the end of the nineteenth century saw belief in it fatally undermined, with hell, 'relegated...to the far-off corners of the Christian mind', it had not been without a struggle.5 Resistance to change had been encouraged by the fact that hell was used as a sanction for social morality, without which, it was believed, man would sink rapidly from a state of civilisation to brutishness and vice.

Whatever an individual's religious stand might be, people still inhabited a society where the maintenance of orthodoxy was inextricably bound up with the maintenance of social order. As the Biblical tradition of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah testifies, the corruption of the city

had always been seen as the centre of evil.6 This sense of the moral significance of the city was also made accessible through a long literary tradition, including Vergil, Dante and Milton, which had used the city as symbolic of man in a state of evil. In their poetry they created the walled cities of Tartarus, Dis and Pandemonium, forerunners of the city which could not be contained within its walls but spilt over to engulf the surrounding villages. At the same time, it was a 'vortex' into which people were inevitably drawn.7

Sims' 'vision of hell', however, is:

> ...more terrible than the immortal Florentine's, and this was no poet's dream - it was a terrible truth, ghastly in its reality, heartbreaking in its intensity, and the doom of the imprisoned bodies in this modern Inferno was as horrible as any Dante depicted for his tortured souls. (HPL 114)

The 'fact' of London transformed metaphor into a literal reality, but in appropriating the intensity and power suggested by those metaphors, the moral weight implicit in them was left unattached. But it was undeniably the hell of familiar imagery made manifest. The implications were enormous. Their exactness and inevitability created a sense of hell-on-earth that questioned afresh the rightness of the social structures that sanctioned, even created, such a city. This hell was created directly by English political and social structures. In this hell, the innates might be innocent. It began to be recognised that moral strength might be, not a state of grace with God, but an environmentally conditioned social acquisition. The 'fact' of London became a critique of the society that brought it

into being, and the God it professed to aspire to.

A similar process can be seen at work in the use of the word 'outcast'. The moral implications were derived from Judaism whose history is the history of outcasts from the moment of Adam and Eve's departure from the Garden of Eden. Experience of hell is always related in the Bible to this sense of being outcast, rather than specifically to a state after death. The poor of London were considered morally outcast for their violence, sexual licence and drunkenness; they were socially outcast because their dirt and disease offended propriety, and their numbers threatened social harmony. Yet they were now being revealed as literally cast out. Through a series of slum clearances that forced them to live in unhealthy or inaccessible areas, they were shoved back from the open thoroughfares and centres of business and administration into areas not yet recognised as part of London.8 Yet, again, in the context of Sims' description of London in the 1880s, the word becomes a comment, not on the action of the poor themselves, but on the inhuman neglect of the communities that existed beside them and cast them out.

The word 'outcast,' so frequently used by Sims, was forged into a clarion call for action by Andrew Mearns' pamphlet, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, published in November 1883 shortly after the last of Sims' articles. Mearns was a Congregational Minister, and the motivation for the writing of The Bitter Cry was his belief in a direct link between immoral behaviour - particularly sexual immorality - and housing conditions, and the need for

increased Church activity on behalf of the poor if religious awareness was not to be totally obliterated. Mearns, then, was approaching his material from a distinctly different viewpoint from Sims. Nevertheless, the similarities in language and total impact are striking. Echoing Sims, (Mearns openly acknowledged his debt to him), Mearns also described slum London in terms of hellish darkness and corruption. He described courts reeking with poisonous and malodorous gases arising from accumulations of sewage and refuse '...often flowing beneath your feet'; 'courts...which the sun never penetrates' (BC 58), and 'putrefying carcases of dead cats or birds, or viler abominations still'. (BC 59) For him, too, it might have been a Dantean vision conjured by 'desponding faith', had it not been so obviously no vision, but a living reality.

However, it was the title of the pamphlet, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, which was to provide the powerful, unifying metaphor that so caught the public imagination. Mearns' particular feat was to make the word 'outcast' known as an indictment of both Church and society, rather than of the outcasts themselves. It was not that his writing had any greater literary merit than that which came before or after, or that his material was particularly original, that singled his pamphlet out. Public awareness was clearly receptive, and an expression of environmentalist ideas and a criticism of the lack of Christian charity was probably more palatable when expressed through the evident sincerity and religious zeal of a Dissenting Minister. Nevertheless, the response to

Mearns' pamphlet was unprecedented. Politicians were again being asked to consider the possibility that society was fundamentally ignorant and wrong in its attitudes. The argument that a person created poverty, committed immoral acts and was dirty of his own conscious choice and preference was gradually becoming less convincing than the argument that inadequate housing, massive unemployment and low wages undermined self-reliance and self-respect. The battle lines were only just being established but that, in itself, was progress.

Mearns' method was extremely simple. He conscientiously tabulated selected facts and figures and related these to the overall condition of society. Finally, he drew the information together in a call to Christian compassion and action, and a demand for State intervention. The biblical connotations of lamentation and tribulation implicit in the title were dramatic and moving, and the facts he presented outraged public sense of morality and justice. Together, the moral implications were again reversed from the guilty poor to the guilty rich, from the lowest to the highest in society, pinpointed in the here and now of London. This growing realisation did much to focus political activity. 'Outcast London' entered the vernacular as a new language of humanitarian and social understanding.9

These stirrings of a new analysis were well established when Charles Booth published the first stage of his Labour and Life of the People: London (East) Volume 1 in 1889. It was the beginning of a task that promised to meet Lord

Salisbury's plea: 'How are we to judge of the measures to remove this evil, if we have no notions of its extent, or how far it is the offspring of mere poverty?'10 Booth's aim was neither religious nor propagandist. His intentions and his achievements were fundamentally different from those who went before him, and his contribution to the forming of new attitudes to poverty was unique. Before considering that uniqueness, however, I want to place him in the context of Sims' and Mearns' writing.

Booth's purpose was to elucidate existing uncertainties by making available systematic facts about wages, poverty, housing, and employment. However, his classified facts about the East End of London can be observed to complement the definition of London as hell by rooting these ideas concretely in social patterns and topographical realities. Rhetoric that had found a new freshness in writing early in the decade could have been made meaningless through over use had it not become precisely focused by the advent of Booth's survey.

For instance, Booth's classification of the classes was obviously hierarchical, with Class A at the bottom, 'the lowest class' and Class H at the top, the upper middle class. What made this significant as a hierarchy of heaven and hell was the fatal division between the classes, and the way it was described. The division occurs between Class D and Class E: '...A,B,C, and D are the classes of poverty sinking to want... while E,F,G, and H are the classes in comfort rising to affluence...' (LLP1 62) The dynamism of

the class structure meant that no division remained entirely static, but at a central point the direction of the movement divides. While four classes move downwards, the other four move an ever increasing distance upwards. In fact, it was possible, as Booth pointed out elsewhere, for members of the classes to cross the divide in both directions, but fundamentally, the lowest classes were divided irrevocably from the others by the process of class drift in an intensely competitive society forcing the weak downwards and helping the strong upwards.

These lowest, weakest classes were seen to inhabit areas that aped the topography of hell. Firstly, many of them were low-lying - Stepney with its 'long length of river frontage' lay in the Thames basin, while Poplar was 'built...on low marshy land', and plagued with 'fevers, resulting it is said from the foul rubbish with which the hollow land has become levelled'. (LLP1 71) Like the symbolic cities of religious and literary tradition which were founded on the chaos of the abyss, the slums of London rested on the insecure foundations of the ill-drained marshes around the tributaries of the Thames. Perhaps this fact prompted the analogy Booth makes later - that the upper classes rested on the 'quagmire' of poverty. (LLP1 596) Desirable suburbs on the other hand, such as Hampstead and Richmond, were built on high ground. These areas are, of course, not described in detail in the early volumes.

For efficient analysis, Booth had decided to divide East London into areas, using as demarcation lines those

most readily suggested by geographical features. What he discovered again reinforced the reality of London as hell. He found that 'residential London tends to be arranged by class in rings'. This is illustrated in detail in Chapter 2.

> A circle drawn 3 miles outside the City boundary practically includes the whole inhabited district; and this may be divided into two parts - an inner ring of 1½ miles ending at the Regent's Canal, and an outer ring of similar width extending to Stoke Newington, Clapton, Homerton, Hackney, Old Ford, Bow, Bromley and The East India Docks. (LLP1 28-29)

These Dantean-like rings had 'the most uniform poverty at the centre'. The Phlegethon/Regent's Canal 'marks a real change in the character of the district....it is in itself a girdle of poverty'. (LLP1 29) Similarly, he confirmed the point already made by George Sims that the 'darkness' is the result of society's thoughtless and exploitative building programmes. Inside this 'inner ring', 'all space and air are at a premium' (LLP1 30) because of the practice of 'filling up'; that is, of using garden and allotment space for the erection of shops, small factories, and warehouses.

The revelatory appropriateness of such information not only validated the small scale and intuitive analyses of earlier writers, but also gave substance to what could have been empty rhetoric in later writings. A good example is the work of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, who was intimately involved with the East End during the 1880s. In his book, In Darkest England and The Way Out, he wrote:

> Darkest England may be described as consisting broadly of three circles, one within the other. The outer and widest circle

> is inhabited by the starving and homeless, but honest, Poor. The second by those who live by Vice; and the third and innermost region at the centre is peopled by those who exist by Crime. The whole of the three circles is sodden with Drink. 11

Here William Booth drew on traditional literary associations, and laced them with a fair amount of sensation. But by 1891 he was also able to draw on knowledge of the reality of the circles which were London's topography, and which did not merely contain London's inhabitants but created them. The conclusions that he himself drew balanced a fervent belief in the judgement of the immortal soul and its eventual damnation or salvation, and the realisation that the influence of environment, poverty and employment degraded and brutalised men and women. This was a position that had gradually evolved from his work among the London poor. In 1865, when the Salvation Army was founded, spiritual salvation had been the thrust of his campaign. Experience of the people he wanted to save, and the conditions they lived in modified his strategies and his ideas. The publication of In Darkest England and The Way Out was both influenced by and contributed to the debate.

Charles Booth's accumulated facts about particularly notorious areas also established a topographical foundation for the prevalent sense of slum London, in this case the East End in particular, as a separate world outcast from civilisation. Physical barriers whether technological or natural were seen to have isolating effects: 'In the middle of this area is a strange group of streets, hemmed in on one side by the railway and entered only here and there on the

other three sides like a fortress through its gates.' He then continued by adding that there were no other places 'whereon the word "outcast" is so deeply branded'.12 This isolation had the effect of rendering its inhabitants untouchable by the norms and laws of the outside world:

> ...this finally culminates in quarters where house reaches back to house, and means of communication are opened through and through, for the convenience and safeguard of the inhabitants in case of pursuit by the police. (LLP1 31)

This feature had also been noted by Sims: 'I found a public house which was a highway for traffic. You went out of a street into a bar - you walked straight through and found yourself in a network of courts behind'. (HPL 77)

This sense of a strange land was to become part of the social consciousness of the time - '"terra incognita" needs to be written on our social map', Booth wrote later and it entered the vernacular as the 'East End' during the 1880s.13 Slum areas were scattered across the whole map of London, but it was the East End which became the focus of public attention, and the name became synonymous with poverty. This perception of it as different continued for many years. In 1901, Walter Besant opened his guide to East London by defining it as a city with an unmistakeable identity, but a city whose 'history is mostly a blank', a city with 'no centre, no heart, no representatives'.14 Even later, Jack London opened his personal account of London, The People of the Abyss, with an apocryphal anecdote. The hansom cab driver's answer to his request to be taken to the East End is '"wot plyce yer wanter go?"' 15

Further examples of darkness and decay which proliferate in Charles Booth's account of slum London are scarcely necessary. The comment he made on the unanimity of opinion among the writers of Volume 1 that 'with very slight variations, all tell the same story', has a wider application. (LLP1 592),16 The writings of Sims, Mearns and Booth, as divergent as their different aims and achievements were, shows the language of popular journalism, evangelism and sociology converging on common ground. Each in turn challenged existing concepts of social morality and individual responsibility, to redefine hell in the terms of the concrete and temporal and, by implication, to relocate the source of evil in the structures of political and economic power.

Section 4

The opening sentence of Sims' first article highlighted a second issue very close to the Victorians' hearts, and reveals the second pattern of imagery used to describe London that I want to discuss. It is drawn from England's experience of primitive cultures through her imperialist activities in Africa, and made familiar through such popular works as Henry Stanley's account of his travels in Africa, How I Found Livingstone (1872).17

The parallels between the damned race of slum dwellers and the unknown tribes of Africa, between the former's

godlessness and the heathen's ignorance, seemed obvious. Society's reactions to them, however, were distinctly different. The races of Africa and other countries in the process of colonisation were a source of much fascination to the Victorian public, and endless concern. Theological questions as to the fate of the heathen's soul after death were hotly disputed. Missionary activity was intense, and all denominations of the church poured money into converting the heathen. Such activity was supported by Parliament for whom the colonies were a source of raw materials and expanding markets. England's conquests overseas were publicly rationalised as the spreading of Christianity and the bringing of the benefits of civilisation to primitive tribesmen.

The 'Dante of the Slums' as Sims was dubbed in his own day, called himself an explorer of a 'dark continent' and an observer of 'the wild races who inhabit it'. The tenuous narrative thread which gives the articles a nominal structural unity refers to his 'journey', and this, together with his ironic persona, are frequently juxtaposed to the journeys of religious and political imperialists who were building up a mass of moral and financial capital on the world stage. Sims' occasional polemic on the values of the Empire (HPL 54-55), and on the ability of the ruling classes to ignore conditions at home while encouraging colonisation abroad, is more often absorbed into strategic approaches. Such explicit attacks could easily be warded off by objectors. Sims was not simply trying to stir his readers'

consciences about the London poor, but to increase their awareness of their own responsibility for it. By adopting the role of an explorer, he was able to reveal the hypocrisy of naming as civilised at all a society that pontificated about the primitive abroad, but ignored the needs of its own citizens. To label London 'the dark continent in our midst' was to challenge not only the lack of parliamentary concern, but to raise again the question: what is this society we have created where the very conditions that appal abroad are sanctioned at home in 'colonies' where 'crime and vice and disorder flourish luxuriantly'; where the benefits of nature have become forces for destruction, so that 'the most degraded savage...is a thousand times better off than the London labourer and his family'. (HPL 58) It was beginning to be hard to see how the question could be answered without a radical rethinking of social attitudes.

The link between 'the dark' and 'the dark continent' needs no elaboration. That the African had black skin gave Sims a further opportunity to reveal the sense of superiority of the ruling powers towards its colonies, but its even crueller neglect of the needs of its own citizens:

> There is a capital picture on the hoardings of London of a little black boy in a bath who has been washed white as far as the neck by Messrs. Somebody's wonderful soap. I do not for a moment dispute the excellent qualities of the moral and political soaps which kindly philanthropists are recommending as likely to accomplish a similar miracle for the Outcast Blackamoors of Horrible London; but I am inclined to think the advocates of these said soaps underestimate the blackness of the boy. (HPL 114)

The interplay of public assumptions that black is undesirable and dirty, dressed up in a sentimental description that glosses over these prejudices against the poor and the primitive, with the subversive suggestion that black is a state of being that is environmentally produced, attacked an ideology based on exploited labour (the Outcast Blackamoor) and exploited market (Africa) for manufacturing profits (Messrs. Somebody's soap). Also in this context it was hard to see what 'soap', that is, what palliative measure, would ease the situation while the social and political structures continued to perpetuate them.

A second look at the first chapter of William Booth's In Darkest England is valuable in discussing these images, since its argument is developed by a comparison between the conditions of London slum dwellers and African tribesmen. The topography of London which manifested so concretely the torments and structures of the Victorian consciousness of hell, seemed to William Booth to have crystallised the surging growth of the jungle into static streets and buildings. He perceived the city as a huge:

> wilderness....where the rays of the sun never penetrate, where in dark, dank air, filled with the steam of the heated morass, human beings dwarfed into pygmies and brutalised into cannibals lurk and live and die. (DE 9)

It could be a description from the articles of Sims and Mearns, the style is so instantly recognisable. The realisation of the environmentalism implicit in this quotation was vigorously followed up: 'Civilisation, which can breed its own barbarians, does it not also breed its own

pygmies?' he asks. (DE 11) It bred mental as well as physical pygmies for 'To many the world is all slum, with the Workhouse as an intermediate purgatory before the grave.' (DE 12)

The word 'civilisation' was now coming under threat. The corrupt city, the centre of evil, already clung to the edges of its history. Its original and philosophically idealised meaning carried the democratic significance of 'to group together in cities', but its connoted meaning had become intermingled with hierarchical ideas of cultural and moral supremacy long before late Victorian England adopted it as a description of their own particular way of life and made it exclusive. It implied the conscious growth of man from his primitive self to an articulate, rational being, and the assumption was that civilisation was good, a positive expression of man's development. The primitive self could be recognised in the savage whose pagan rituals, sexual licence and mysterious social organisation marked him out as being at an early stage of evolution. Popular acceptance of the link between the savage and the London poor exaggerated the fear that civilisation might collapse into atavistic forms under pressure from the 'barbarians' of the London masses.

'To group together in cities', as perceived through the very different eyes of Sims, Mearns and Charles Booth, subscribed neither to the view of patriotic complacency nor to irrational panic. However, Sims clearly did support the view that civilisation was allowing forces to develop within

it that could eventually destroy it. Mearns, too, felt that civilisation had become a facade:

> In the very centre of our great cities, concealed by the thinnest crust of civilisation and decency, is a vast mass of moral corruption, of heart-breaking misery and absolute godlessness. (BC 55)

Charles Booth came to a different conclusion and was openly scornful about such ideas:

> The London barbarians of whom we have heard, who, issuing from their slums, will one day overwhelm modern civilisation, do not exist. (LLP1 39)

His reasons for this conclusion will emerge later, but this change of attitude was, with hindsight, to prove a demarcation line between the attitudes at the beginning and the end of the decade. However, Booth was well aware of the paradox that, far from enhancing life and extending the potential of man, society had, in the form of London, become reductive of it:

> She [London] draws them in...but sooner or later...the spell may fall on them, and the process of deterioration begin. Elsewhere in this book, London has been called the Circe among cities, and the analogy is a close one, for too often she exercises over her visitants her irresistible fascination only in the end to turn them into swine. (LLP1 554)

'The stony streets of London' revealed to him, as it had also done to William Booth, 'the artificialities and hypocrisies of modern civilisation' (DE 13), but they also revealed themselves as a social construct for which members of society were, therefore, responsible. All three thought it possible to resolve the ambiguities brought to light by the discovery of two 'dark continents'.

Section 5

The publication of Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species in 1859 had not made answers to the questions raised by urbanisation any easier to find. Although vigorously rejected in many quarters when it first appeared, the debate it had created permeated all levels of moral and social philosophy. A view of nature as:

> ... the language of the sense,
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.18

was challenged by a view of '...the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horribly cruel works of nature', where the evolution of species and the propagation of fitness and strength were achieved through ruthless competition.19 These ideas spilled over into popular imagery in a series of natural metaphors linked specifically with uncontrollable, destructive natural phenomena. It is these, and, more particularly, images related to the theory of the survival of the fittest, that form the third and final web of images highlighted by George Sims' writing which I want to discuss.

Sims accepted the existence of these forces, and blamed the wealthy for not ameliorating the harshness of natural law but leaving 'the weak the poor and the ignorant to work out in their proper persons the theory of the survival of the fittest to its bitter end'. (HPL 3) The civilisation that should have eased the battle for survival and allowed room for moral, spiritual and intellectual development had conspired to rob its members of that opportunity. Removed

from the actual process of evolution, the forces have become distorted. Slumdom was 'a cankerworm in the heart of this fair city' (HPL 3), and its influence on the inhabitants is seen as 'the rank luxuriance of nettle and weed'. (HPL 143) For Mearns, it is the failure of Christian compassion and parliamentary concern that has released these brute forces, pushing people into 'the lair of a wild beast' (HPL 55), and 'dens' where they must live worse 'than the uncleanest of brute beasts'. (BC 69)

In Charles Booth's writing, the scientific approach reveals a more precise position. For him, the masses held no fear, and 'metaphors' were 'usually misleading'. (LLP1 554) His observation led him to see that the interaction of environment and poverty led to the undermining of physical, and, consequently, mental health. 'Adaptation' was taking on a new, much more sinister, significance. Sims had commented freely on 'The wretched, stunted, misshapen child-objects' who 'come into the world physically and mentally unfit' (HPL 22), and this is echoed in Mearns' description of 'stunted, misshapen and often loathsome objects'. (BC 6) That this was not exaggeration or sensationalism is confirmed by Booth:

> ... in this the greatest town of all, that muscular strength and energy get gradually used up; the second generation of Londoner is of lower physique...than the first, and the third generation (where it exists) is lower than the second. (LLP1 553)

We can see that Booth is unconsciously moving towards an indictment of the political structures of the society he inhabited, where the encouragement of competition based on laissez-faire policies was swallowing up valuable human

resources. What was being questioned again was where responsibility should be placed. Even if only self interest operated, the implication was that if society wished to benefit from such an economic system, which Spencer has so satisfyingly justified in his theory of Social Darwinism, then it must provide an environment which encouraged health and strength, not the 'bleached, obscene, nocturnal' creatures later realised in H.G. Wells' Morlocks in The Time Machine (1895).20 Ironically, but predictably perhaps, it was self-interest that brought this point home when the need for soldiers for the Boer War confirmed the fact of the appallingly low standard of health among that section of the population who should have swelled the fighting ranks.21

Section 6

Although many passages of Charles Booth's writings are shot through with the shared metaphors of the time, or, by juxtaposition, are seen to parallel and substantiate those common metaphors with the factual information that he offers, his unique place in this discussion is only revealed when he is considered in relation to his role as statistician and social scientist. Victorians were 'aware...they were living through a period of change of scale'. (VC 84) London, in particular, with its swelling population and sprawling suburbs, was outgrowing the limited response of specific case histories and anecdote where

number was used only as rhetoric to sway public opinion. Booth's Life and Labour of the People was a response to a growing need for a new methodology which could encompass the size of the problem. He felt that 'size' in the sense of depths of suffering could only be understood if, first, 'size' in the sense of number and area could be grasped:

> In intensity of feeling...and not in statistics, lies the power to move the world. But by statistics must this power be guided if it would move the world aright. (LLP1 598)

As Asa Briggs points out:

> It was because the pioneering statisticians of this period were thought of as explorers of society.... that they were able to influence both the collective will and the individual literary imagination. (VC 87)

More precisely, it was because statisticians offered a new articulation, a new kind of language, through which to understand the problems that faced them, that people were given a greater sense of control over them. In order to achieve scientific objectivity, Booth deliberately detached himself from the implications of individual suffering contained in the information he was amassing, and it was this desire for objectivity, striving against the assumptions of the age, that reveals some glimpses of language in the process of change and makes Booth such fascinating reading. Working in the same situation as Sims and Mearns, Booth's methods turned out to be the most influential and enduring in describing social processes.

What earlier works about London conditions had made clear was the need for a specific rather than a relational language, that is, delimited meanings working within a

defined context rather than moral meanings drawing on socio/collective ideas through metaphor. For Booth to ensure that facts would be assessed without prejudice, he recognised that he needed to divest words of accumulated meanings. He based his ability to achieve this on the assumption that words have a direct and unambiguous relationship with the reality they describe, and were, therefore, capable of impartially recording the 'facts' about London conditions. When he set out on the research for his survey in the mid eighties, he also believed that it was actually possible to gather every fact necessary for forming a complete picture:

> The root idea with which I began to work was that every fact I needed was known to someone, and that the information had simply to be collected and put together. (LLP1 15)

These 'facts' were then to be used to establish numerical relationships, and he saw himself as creating 'a large statistical framework which is built to receive an accumulation of facts'. (VC 93) In other words, statistics promised to be the demystifying tool that would render the disturbing and evocative images conjured up by Sims, Mearns, General Booth and others, translatable into a form that could be the foundation of social strategy rather than being lost in a welter of impotent fear and emotion.

Booth was profoundly aware of the need to define his language if it was indeed to be free of bias and prejudice. However, although he could easily avoid the rhetoric of hell and jungles, he could not always avoid ambiguity. At the outset he was conscious, and became increasingly more

conscious, of at least two obstacles in his determination to move towards a new objective language. Significantly, he commented on decisions that had been taken before 'scientific definition' could, in fact, be made. He instanced the definition of 'poverty' which would include different individuals according to the standpoint of the person who determined the definition. If 'poverty' was defined within the language of moral responsibility and individuality, a man who drank away a meagre working wage would not be poor; but if defined within the language of collective humanism, he would. At times, Booth found it necessary to digress in order to progress, as his discussion of poverty revealed:

> It is to be remarked further that apart from bias two distinct mental attitudes continually recur in considering poverty...On the one hand we may argue that the poor are often really better off than they appear to be, on the ground that when extravagances which keep them in poverty are constant and immediate in their action, the state of things resulting cannot reasonably be called poverty at all....On the other hand we may as logically, or perhaps more logically, disregard the follies past or present which bring poverty in their train....
>
> In this temper we prefer to view and consider these unfortunates only as they actually exist, constantly put to shifts to keep a house together; always struggling and always poor. And turning in this direction the mind dwells upon the terrible stress in times of sickness or lack of work for which no provision, or no adequate provision, has been made. According as the one or other of these two points of view is taken, thousands of families may be placed on one or the other side of the doubtful line of demarcation between class and class among the poor. (LLP 1 18-19)

I have quoted this passage in full because it reveals

so clearly the minefield through which Booth found himself treading. He was clearly experiencing some unease as he found his material moving him towards a critique of the values of the society within which poverty existed. He also found himself being pushed towards answers to the questions that his facts raised. This was because the facts he had assiduously collected proved to be dynamic not static. Yet, how impartial or how challenging could such a survey be, if terms already coloured by the ideological framework that evolved or adapted them, were allowed to remain so?

Conscious of the potentially ambiguous nature of language, but determined to keep its relationship to reality as closely defined and direct as possible, Booth embarked upon the task of showing 'the numerical relation which poverty, misery and depravity bear to regular earnings and comparative comfort, and to describe the general conditions under which each class lives.' (LLP1 6) In many ways he did this triumphantly. Not only did the language of the concrete and specific provide the foundation for a conceptual language of urban dynamics in a way that Sims' and Mearns' could not, but it reflected the social conditions and patterns of the East London of the 1880s as vividly as their work.22

A brief example will show how this emerges in Booth's text. Each of the street tables is as appropriate as another. I will take the Marshall Street table on page 128, Volume 2. (See Appendix.) The facts are presented in list form with columns divided into house numbers; house

divisions; numbers of rooms within house divisions; numbers of people living in each room; sex and age of inhabitants; their employment. The information accumulated in each column does indeed give the 'instantaneous picture' that Booth claimed and simultaneously conveys a sense of daily living patterns. (LLP1 26) Men go to and from work; children, to and from school; wives to and from charing. Into the street move two new families; out of the street move the widow with cancer and the lunatic husband. During the day the business premises and workshops, the milkshop and sweet shop operate, while the home workers sew and wash. Through the structures of a simple classification, Booth enables the facts themselves to create a sense of a 'turmoil of life' without emotive or moral rhetoric.

However, Booth's classification achieved much more than this - it began to expose the dichotomy between the tabulated facts and the assumptions behind the accompanying commentary. The naming of the first three columns in itself establishes the density of humanity which occupied this street, and the numerical total, 146 people in 7 houses, let out as 48 separate rooms, underpins this realisation. The brief descriptions of employment raise the possibility of a relationship between ill-health and poverty, and point to the element of chance in an individual's survival, whether the support of the helpless by the chance of family, state charity, the Church or individual benevolence. For example, 'Man and wife. Old, bedridden. Rent paid by gentleman. Wife charing.' They also raise questions about the gap between

necessities and wages; between the availability of workers and the opportunities of the labour market.

Booth's awareness of the changes already at work (though not, at this time, the extent of their significance for the terminology of his own study) was noted in a small example of his own choosing and sharpens the reader's awareness of more significant shifts at work within the text that Booth himself unconsciously instigated:

> Of such sort are the poorest class of houses. Beside the evidence of configuration, these little places are often called "gardens", telling their story with unintended irony. But in other cases all sentiment is dropped, and another tale about their origin finds expression in the name, "So and so's rents" - not houses, nor dwellings, nor cottages, nor buildings, nor even a court or a yard, suggesting human needs, but just "rents". (LLP1 30)

Here the change of attitude is clearly marked by a change of word, and the point Booth was making was largely a moral one. Nevertheless, the function of the factual object has remained constant, i.e. to house people, but the shift from 'gardens' to 'rents' has marked a shift in values from the recognition of a person's relationship to the space he inhabits to the dehumanising of a person into an economic unit.

Such a change of terminology as the one described above, which had already taken place, directly and unambiguously reflected urbanisation and the pervasive concern for capital and profits. It was much harder for Booth to be aware of his own contribution to semantic change, since the process is less obvious when single words

carry the weight of a current ideology, but are forced into semantic shifts by their application to a current situation in which they are rapidly proved to be inappropriate. In Booth's text, there are frequent examples of this. Key words such as 'labour', 'employment' and the already mentioned 'poverty', were already enmeshed in the semantic fusion between economic liberalism and Protestant morality, where, '...since economic success was the token of religious sanctity, failure to achieve success implied lack of divine favor, and therefore moral inadequacy and personal guilt.'23

In other passages, the language began to redefine itself by shifting responsibility from the individual 'idlers', 'loafers' and 'doubtful characters' to the environment they inhabited, and by implication the society that sanctioned them. The history of the word 'loafer', to which Booth made a crucial contribution, epitomises this shift. In popular currency in both America and England it expressed a positive enjoyment of social irresponsibility, an embracing of ease dependent on the hard work of others.

> When the term first began to be popular in 1834 or 1835, I can distinctly remember that it meant to pilfer...but in a very short time all the tribe of loungers under the sun...were called loafer.24

By the end of the nineteenth century, terms such as 'loaferism' and 'loaferdom' denoted the sense that this was a way of living, a state of mind chosen by the morally reprehensible at the expense of society. 'Loafing' on the streets created obvious opportunities for crime, and there was fear of 'The dangers which "loafership" entails upon the

future of any juvenile'.25 A loafer, multiplied into thousands of loafers in the poorer areas of London; their detachment from the mores of the society they parasited on, and their openness to criminal activity, posed a threat to moral and economic stability. Booth's conscious use of the term carried these implications. He used it only of members of Class A. 'The lowest class, which consists of some occasional labourers, street-sellers, loafers, criminals and semi-criminals' and his comment reflects clearly the common theory that moral weakness was intrinsic and hereditary:

> It is much to be desired and to be hoped that this class may become less hereditary in its character. There appears to be no doubt that it is now hereditary to a very considerable extent. (LLP1 38)

He refused to define loafers in terms of 'poverty' as this was seen as a possible result of the relationship between the size and skill of the labour pool and the requirements of employment, an irrelevant criterion for those young men who 'will not work, who take naturally to loafing' (my italics), and those 'girls who take almost naturally to the streets'. (My italics).

Nevertheless, the mass of evidence with which Booth scrupulously surrounded these statements, holds the word up for redefinition. Though specific instances are necessarily scattered and random, the cumulative impact is undeniable. On the one hand Booth discussed Class A as a separate entity. He said that they were 'beyond enumeration' - that is, they were not susceptible to identification and classification in terms of 'quantitive value'. He saw them

as a race apart, hostile to the encroachment of society and fiercely independent. He described them in the metaphorical terms applied more loosely to the working classes by other writers, as making 'an Alsatia of their own'. Yet, at other points in Volume 1, Class A, the loafers, was shown not to be an absolute after all, but to exist in relation to Class B. Class B, (LLP1 39-4]), was comprised of the 'very poor', from whom, 'there is no room to subtract anything', who were only able to exist as economic units because of charity, the pawnshop, and local shop credit. The lowness of their wages was, however, only one factor in their poverty. Root causes were irregularity or unavailability of work, sickness, large families, and other external circumstances such as drink. 'If hand or foot slip, down they must go'. Here, Booth shows his awareness of the paradox he has revealed. The line between 'loafer' and 'casual labourer' was blurred, he claimed. The explanation he went on to give was that in times of scarce employment, class drift thrust Class C into direct competition with Class B. As a result many in Class B lost their frail grip on already insecure jobs, and sank to swell the ranks of Class A. Pushed down into Class A by the ruthless competition of laissez-faire capitalism in which someone must lose and which was deplored by Booth as society's 'disease' (LLP1 162), did the morally respectable hard-working man become the morally inadequate loafer? Booth further noted the effects of job insecurity on morale, that 'labour deteriorated under casual employment' (LLP1 152), and he began to question openly whether the mental ability

to work or desire to work was not the direct outcome of the way the employment market operated. Could this imply that economic structures were responsible for moral deterioration? Could heredity mean, not the passing on of genetic characteristics, but the reoccurrence of them when people were subjected to the same environment over a period of time?

Booth concluded his discussion with this comment:

> The present system suits the character of the men. They suit it and it suits them, and it is impossible to say where this vicious circle begins. (LLP1 152)

This perfect example of the adaptation of the species suggests, through this circuitous route, that a 'loafer' was not necessarily a man who would not work, but a man adapted to a situation where there was no work. He was not necessarily a man who consciously cheated society of his labour, but a man rendered mentally and physically unfit by the society which refused him employment. It is interesting that the word was forced out of common usage as these early realisations became the foundation of a social welfare policy.26

Limited space requires that some examination of Booth's Class C, (LLP1 44-48), must be a final example of the 'unintended irony' set up by the tension between intended objectivity and assumed collective meaning. Class C is defined by its 'intermittent earnings', basically because its members are reliant on either seasonal employment, such as building trades, or on irregular employment, such as dock work. Booth noted that employers have not worked out a

system for dovetailing jobs, so that regular wages were virtually impossible to earn. He also noted that workers were vulnerable to other unpredictable factors, such as industrial accidents, illness, and the number of children born. Yet within this factual context, he made certain observations about the characters and attitudes of such labourers. On the dovetailing of employment, he commented, '...most of the men make no effort. They take things as they come ...or, try, almost hopelessly, for casual work'. (LLP1 45) On saving for the future against periods of unemployment or illness, he commented, 'I fear that the bulk of those whose earnings are irregular are wanting in ordinary prudence,' and finally characterised them as 'a somewhat helpless class', for their lack of labour organisation.

Within Class C, two other types of workers carry these ambiguities in his definition of them. High wages could be earned in jobs requiring considerable physical strength, such as coal heaving, but, lamented Booth, 'Many of them eat largely and drink freely till the money is gone'. (LLP1 45) At the other end of the scale, women workers did 'charing, or washing or needlework, for very little money' to supplement the family income, but 'they bring no particular skill or persistent effort to what they do.' (LLP1 48)

None of this discussion argues for Booth's blindness - far from it. It was his determination to use an objective language that made possible an unambiguous awareness of the condition of London's slums and London's poor. Although he was part of the vanguard of statisticians that were

developing a language of numbers to achieve this objectivity, Labour and Life of the People is an amalgam of numerical records contextualised by descriptive and annotating commentary. It achieves objectivity in as much as it invites the reader to be conscious of the need for objectivity, is conscientious enough to allow paradoxes to emerge and to acknowledge them, and honest enough to point towards a view of the economics of employment that Booth himself was wary of accepting. It must have been with some relief that Booth finally reached Class E, where the norms of his society at last fitted the observable facts. Class E:

> ...I believe, and am glad to believe... holds its future in its own hands.... it does not constitute a majority of the population in the East of London, nor, probably, in the whole of London, but it perhaps may do so taking England as a whole. (LLP1 51)

Booth's survey was only one of many different kinds of writing that were emerging at the time. Sociologists, reformers and novelists alike were trying to encompass and explain the unknown and apparently incomprehensible experience of London's growth and conditions. London had become a breeding ground for disease and poverty, and, because of this, had become a source of dissension about social hierarchies; about the relationship of man and God; about whether civilisation was a manifestation of God's design or a brutal combat of competitive forces. The language available to them was not always adequate for their task, and writers often found themselves compelled to describe the new in terms of the old or currently popular images. When expressed through the common currency of

eschatological, biological and religious-imperialist imagery, a startling appropriateness to man's sense of the possible crumbling of the old order, and the imminence of radical change was suggested.

For such writers as Sims and Mearns, this clash was creative, enabling them to hold up contemporary assumptions for re-examination. The growth in statistics was a response to the need for new definitions, and it is one of Booth's achievements that he used it in such a way that the instincts and convictions of those sincerely concerned with the social conditions were given scientific grounds from which to resolve the ambiguities. Reading these texts is to observe some of the processes of transition from the language of individualism and collective faith to the language of social responsibility and individual doubt. Its parallel - as Booth perceived himself (LLP1 6), was in the world of literary creativity and the literary mode most characteristic of the 1880s - the work of the realistic novelists. It is the distinct contribution made by some of these novelists that I now want to discuss.

Notes

1. George R. Sims, How the Poor Live and Horrible London (London, 1889). The book is a collection of two series of articles written for The Daily News in 1882 and 1884. Afterwards referred to in the text as HPL followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

2. There were various strands of radical thought at this time. In 1881, H.M. Hyndman, a founder member of the Social Democratic Federation, published The Historical Basis of Socialism (London, 1881). The Fabian Society was founded in 1884. Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engel's The Communist Manifesto had been available in England from as early as 1848.

3. George Sims was a well known public figure before he published his articles about the London slums. He ran a popular newspaper column called 'Mustard and Cress' for over forty years. For biographical information, see Arthur Calder-Marshall's Introduction to his edition of Sims' ballads, Prepare to Shed Them Now (London, 1968).

   Andrew Mearns had been a Congregational minister in Chelsea, and at the time of writing his pamphlet, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, was Secretary to the Congregational Union.

4. Sims comments in some detail on the advantages and disadvantages of the Education Act 1870 in How the Poor Live and Horrible London; pp. 26-45, 48-54. He comments less extensively but just as vehemently on the Artisans' Dwellings Act 1875 and 1879; pp. 11-13 and 106-107.

5. W.E. Gladstone, 'Studies Subsidiary to the works of Bishop Butler' (1898), cited in Hell and the Victorians by Geoffrey Howell (Oxford, 1974) p. 212.

6. The city has, of course, a dual nature - the 'heavenly city' and Jerusalem as the image of the heavenly city occurs in Revelations, and has as long a religious and literary tradition as the city of evil. Charles Booth himself refers hopefully to the London of the future as 'Jerusalem' in the final paragraph of his survey. For further discussion of London as a spiritual centre, see below, Chapters 5 and 6.

7. Charles Booth, Labour and Life of the People, First Series, 3, (London, 1902), p. 75.

8. These areas were incorporated into the administrative responsibility of the London County Council in 1888. Details of slum clearance for the building of large arterial roads, railways etc. and the way it aggravated

an already acute housing problem can be found in 'Slums and Suburbs' by H.J. Dyos and D.A. Reeder in Victorian Cities: Images and Realities Vol.1 edited by H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London, 1973).

9. See Anthony S. Wohl, 'The Bitter Cry of Outcast London', International Review of Social History, 13 (1968), pp. 189-233 (p. 205-206, footnote 4).

10. Lord Salisbury, 'Labourers' and Artisans' Dwellings', National Review, 9 (November 1883), in Andrew Mearns, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, p. 125.

11. General William Booth, In Darkest England and The Way Out (London, 1891), p. 24. Afterwards referred to in the text as DE followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

12. Charles Booth, Labour and Life of the People. Third series. Vol.6 (London, 1902), p. 15.

13. Charles Booth, Labour and Life of the People. Second Industry Series. Vol. 1. (London, 1902), p. 18.
The earliest recorded use in the Oxford English Dictionary is 1883, but the Pall Mall Gazette reference, (August 14, 11/1) to 'The stereotyped East-Ender of London' indicates that it was in common usage by 1884.

14. Walter Besant, East London (London, 1901), p. 3.

15. Jack London, The People of the Abyss (London and West Nyack, 1977), p. 12. First published in Great Britain in 1903.

16. Charles Booth collaborated with Beatrice Potter, David F. Schloss, Ernest Aves, Stephen N. Fox, Jesse Argyle, Clara Collet and H. Llewellyn-Smith to write Volume 1 of the Labour and Life of the People.

17. Stanley, Sir Henry Morton, How I Found Livingstone (London, 1872). See also Helen Lynd, The Eighteen Eighties Chapter 2, for information on the extent of England's colonies at this time.

18. William Wordsworth, 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', lines 109-112, in The Lyrical Ballads, edited by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (London, 1971), p. 170. Text of the first edition published in 1798.

19. Charles Darwin, quoted in Darwin and Darwinism, edited by Harold Y. Vanderpool, p. xxxii.

20. H.G. Wells, The Short Stories of H.G. Wells (London, 1928), p. 56.

21. See Samuel Hynes' The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princetown, New Jersey, 1968), pp. 22-25 for a discussion of the controversy centred around the physical unfitness of the ordinary soldier.

22. See Harold Pfautz, Charles Booth on the City: Physical Pattern and Social Structure, for an evaluation of Booth's contribution to sociological methodology. This aspect of Booth will be further discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to George Gissing's novels.

23. Helen M. Lynd, The Eighteen Eighties, p. 11.

24. The Oxford English Dictionary. Example taken from Leland, English Gipsies and Their Language (1873).

25. The Oxford English Dictionary. Field Magazine, 28 September 1889, is given as the earliest recorded example of 'loafership'.

26. It is impossible to deal with other specific terms in such detail. Also worthy of note are (i) the emphasis on 'thrift', which C. Booth considered should be 'a pre-condition or consequence of assistance', set against his own information that 35% of East London's population had poor or irregular earnings and his own conclusion that, 'thrift needs the regular payment of weekly wages to take root freely' (LLP1 46.); and (ii) the criticism of 'improvidence' despite documented evidence of labour being controlled by supply and demand markets and the existence of large families.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INNER CITY: THE FUNCTION OF FICTIONAL SLUMS IN THE NOVELS OF WALTER BESANT, MARGARET HARKNESS AND GEORGE GISSING,

1882-1889

The novels I have chosen to discuss in this chapter are examples of three profoundly different perceptions of London in the 1880s. They were all written before the first volumes of Booth's survey were published, and during the first shock waves of public response to the information that was being disseminated about social conditions. Between them they span the years 1882 to 1888. Walter Besant, whose All Sorts and Conditions of Men (1882) is the earliest of the novels chosen, was born in 1836. He brought to his writing the consciousness of an earlier generation, though his concern about contemporary conditions showed itself in practical involvement in the East End at the time. When George Gissing wrote Thyrza (1887) he was no longer living in the poverty he had encountered when he first arrived in London, but his recent experiences were fresh in his mind during his scrupulous research around Lambeth and South London for the novel's specific location. Of the three novelists, Margaret Harkness had had the shortest contact with London when she wrote Out of Work in 1888. She had run away from an upper

middle class family - she was, in fact, closely related to Beatrice Webb, Charles Booth's collaborator on the first volume of Labour and Life - to join the Salvation Army in 1884. Her time with the Army and her later involvement with Socialist groups in London gave her first hand experience of poverty. Of the three novels central to this discussion hers was the most immediate response to specific events. It was published in 1888, the year of the unemployment riots which are described in the text.

These novelists, therefore, have one significant common denominator - personal experience of and involvement with some of London's worst and least known areas during a period of urban crisis. It was this moment in the city's long history that they each attempted to recreate in their novels, and each one made the physical fact of London central to the novel's interest. All chose to write within a well-established realistic tradition, but each novelist used it differently. Each one creates a different identity for London, - different social relationships, different social morality - and, crucially, each one reveals varying extents of London's power over its inhabitants' potential.

The relationship between these novels will be seen to be very different from the relationship between the sociological works discussed in the first chapter. There it was argued that differences of discourse did not ultimately disguise similarities of viewpoint. This feeling was supported by the clarity of the writers' intentions and the lack of ambiguity in the reader's position. The novelists,

however, who were all working within the same realistic tradition, used that form to express radically differing ideas. These differences, however, will not be usefully assessed in terms of relative distances from some measurable truth. It is through each novel's own internal coherence that the reader is able to experience a sense of authenticity of human experience, rather than through the evaluation of a questionable referential accuracy. The varied treatments of London in these novels do not necessarily cancel each other out. Rather they provide a range of perspectives across what individual writers considered to be the truth.

Section 2

The ambiguous relationship between the external reality of London and the world of the novel is highlighted where a literary recreation of that reality is known to be one of the author's prime concerns. This is true of Walter Besant, whose All Sorts and Conditions of Men (1882) and The Children of Gibeon (1886) are based on his personal experience of London's streets and London's poor, and whose choice of subject matter sprang directly from personal concern.1 This concern had increasingly involved him in disseminating information about East End conditions, and in practical social work.2 In his novels, he hoped to acquaint his readers with the areas and the problems he had

encountered and share with them his vision of future possibilities. For the purposes of this discussion, I will concentrate on the earlier novel, though, in fact, both novels illustrate similar points. However, All Sorts and Conditions of Men is the pioneering text, written even before The Bitter Cry of Outcast London had made poverty a popular issue. Also, the romance element, present in both novels, is less obvious than in Children of Gibeon which is clearly a traditional fairy tale in contemporary dress.

All Sorts and Conditions of Men is located in Whitechapel among the poor but respectable working classes. Besant is not concerned with the tragic and disturbing material that filled the work of George Sims and Andrew Mearns. His sympathies are engaged by those he perceived as having the capacity to reject the mean monotony and dreariness of their daily lives for the behavioural and cultural norms of the middle classes. The central figure is an educated, upper class woman who comes to the East End in disguise to investigate the working classes for herself. She stays to help and eventually to transform their way of life. Implicit in the narrative is the suggestion that new perceptions and aspirations will rapidly rid the East End of its ugliness and its separateness from West End culture.

P.J. Keating includes a full discussion of Besant, his place in literary history and his unique contribution to the literature of the East End in the 1880 in his survey and investigation, The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction.3 Keating rightly attributes Besant's failure as a novelist

partly to the incongruous coupling of the fairy tale with social realism, and partly to the 'avoidance' devices which he claims that Besant used to sidestep the profoundly disturbing aspects of poverty and social disharmony in a novel professedly about those very issues. I want to consider the nature of Besant's 'realism' more specifically.

To establish what images of London and London life in All Sorts and Conditions of Men were realistic by reference to contemporary sources is straightforward. It is well documented that Walter Besant was familiar with the East End and that for many of his contemporaries Besant's view of the East End was the only one to be trusted. He was the one who 'has probably done more than any other to familiarize the general public with the true character of that dark continent called the "East End"'.4 He had written a five volume survey of London areas, one volume of which was dedicated to East London.5 He says of himself in his autobiography that his starting point for his novels was accurate and detailed information, and from that grew his feelings of compassion and sympathy for the places and people he observed.6 He laid no claim to scientific objectivity, which is probably why Beatrice Webb was later to dismiss him 'as a quack, so far as investigation is concerned'.7 However, there can be little doubt that those areas of the East End that he chose to describe were very probably depicted with great accuracy. Yet the way in which Besant shared his knowledge with his readers fatally undermines a sense of that accuracy. While he clearly drew

the reading public's attention to the East End, whether he informed them of its 'true nature' is less certain.

The two novels he wrote that were particularly concerned with the East End have a framework of realistic description of streets, houses, and, in Children of Gibeon, the conditions of women home workers. Realism took the form of lengthy, topographically correct descriptions of the East End that introduce or set the scene for the ensuing action, as well as facts about wages, hours and working conditions and information about working class eating and social habits. The descriptions of the East End's streets and houses are the most pervasive. These rapidly become repetitive, and then, in the second part of the novels, virtually disappear. The descriptions appear to have the function of 'setting the scene', a backdrop against which action takes place but which has no part to play in infuencing it.

Readers are invited to participate in an investigation of 'all that great and marvellous unknown country which we call East London...'. (ALL Preface) What they are given are reiterated phrases around the central idea of dullness: '...how monotonous must be the daily life in these dreary streets,' (ALL 47), 'the sad and monotonous streets of east London' (ALL 46) and similar phrases echo through the text. In other words, Besant wished to establish a particular viewpoint of the East End, that of an area as mean and monotonous in its quality of life as in its streets and buildings as a fact.

What Besant did not appear to be concerned to do was to sustain a direct response to this environment in his readers. London is not explored outside these frequently reiterated phrases which become reference points within the novel serving simply to remind readers of the location. The context to which they refer becomes increasingly vague as the novel progresses, so that even a sense of a referential relationship to the external world of the East End is finally undermined. We will see a similar technique used by the writers of the Christian Socialist novels in the 1890s for a similar reason - that is, to loosen the constraints of realism on the plot. In Besant's novel, London is reduced to a few motifs which serve to decorate the plot with minimal 'realistic' touches. The effect of this is to lessen not only London's own intrinsic interest, but its dynamic role as a formative influence on its inhabitants. The relationship between the nature of the environment and the quality of peoples' lives claimed to be significant by the heroine, is nullified by Besant's use of description.

How did Besant set up such a separation of location and action in a novel which implies their interdependence, and which is central to his declared purposes? The answer lies in his dislocation of the timescale of the novel. That is, Besant subordinated his immediate experience of the working classes and of the East End in the late 1870s and early 1880s to his vision of them in the future. To achieve this, he chose to telescope long term processes into a matter of months, and in doing so created a plot which drew

more on elements of romance than realism.

At the beginning of All Sorts and Conditions of Men Besant establishes the East End as having an external reality belonging to a specific point in London's history, but the cause and effects of the plot are not pursued through a complementary realistic time scale. This is one reason why the novel's insistence on realistic description falls away so quickly. Since the East End of the present was declared as having no identity of its own, it was only worth observing in its potential for transformation from chrysalis to butterfly. In 'blissful reverie' Angela saw, '... the mean houses turned into red brick Queen Anne terraces and villas; the dingy streets...planted with avenues of trees...'. (ALL 52) Whitechapel is depicted like the 'before' image in a modern 'before and after' photographic sequence, interesting only for its proof of its own worthlessness and the value of the change wrought upon it.

Besant certainly wished to be scrupulous about not offending his readers, as Keating points out, by avoiding the unpleasant and the crude. It is also true that he was more interested in depicting the potential of the East End as he perceived it, rather than insisting on its present state. The soundness of Besant's vision is not the question. There is no intrinsic reason why a projection into a society's future, based on knowledge of its present, should not be a realistic one. But a definition of realism in a narrative set in the future surely relates to the

authenticity of the vision from the perspective of the known and familiar, not in exact referential accuracy. Besant appears to ignore the difference and tries to incorporate an imaginative projection in whose possibility he personally believed, into a realistic fictional form set in the immediate contemporary world. By doing so, he seriously weakened the novel's credibility.

Various other factors also contribute to the sense of distance between the contemporary world of the East End and Besant's vision of its future. One is Besant's relationship with his reader. He attacked the independence of the reader by working from the assumption of a shared viewpoint where the reader is generically the same as the author, but less well informed, less perceptive and less thoroughly engaged. This shared viewpoint, in its turn, presupposed a shared class and a shared language. Although the author's politeness suggests a dialogue, his mildly avuncular air silences us. The reader is intended to listen:

> Remark, if you please, that this girl [Nelly] had never once before, in all her life, conversed with a lady....It is a world full of strange and wonderful things; the more questions we ask, the more we may; and the more things we consider, the more incomprehensible does the sum of things appear. Inquiring reader, I do not know how Nelly divined that her visitor was a lady. (ALL 69)

and intended to learn:

> This, my friends, is a truly astonishing thing, and a thing unknown until this century. Perhaps, however...perhaps, in every great city, the same loss of individual manhood may be found. (ALL 95)

To disagree would be to flout the protocol of middle class

social relationships and to undermine the informing moral principles. We are allowed only to accept. This assumed empathy of author and reader provides the apparently 'missing' middle class voice within the text. Keating points out that the plot revolves around the working classes and the upper classes, and sees this as reflective of Besant's hatred of the class war and his desire to avoid it. This is, of course, part of the truth, but what this view neglects is the powerful role that Besant has allocated the middle classes as observers. The plot is enacted for the benefit and edification of the middle classes, who, throughout the text, are invited to nod their approval of what is happening.

The difficulties in accepting the supposed identification of author and reader is further compounded by Besant's unquestioning approval of his major protagonist, Angela Messenger. Her every word and action is appreciatively recorded, and it is her role in the novel to make education, culture and self-improvement accessible to the working classes. She does not represent one clear facet of class identity herself. Rather she is an amalgam of recognisable contemporary models. She is supposedly a 'new' woman, bred by the universities into the modern world of the 1880s:

> A girl does not live at Newnham for two years for nothing, mind you; when she leaves that seat of learning, she has changed her mind about the model, the perfect, the ideal woman. (ALL 2)

She is also the epitome of self-effacing modesty that marks her as belonging to 'that rapidly diminishing body of women

who prefer to let the men do all the public speaking'. (ALL 327) She radiates ideal femininity which has a soothing effect on rough factory girls and inspires Harry to heights of altruism. Her power links her to the upper classes, her femininity to the aspirations of the middle classes. In addition, her femininity is 'instinctive', so that 'Those who conversed with her became infected with her culture'. (ALL 123)

The mode of thought that made Angela both a product of instinct and of a cultural heritage indicates how powerful was the belief in a behavioural and moral norm which the working classes had only to claim, to possess. Angela's wealth is not the result of an aristocratic heritage. She is a business man's daughter, whose apparently infinite wealth is drawn from a brewery based in the East End. Though the existence of that wealth is crucial, its implications in reference to class structure is unacknowledged.

Angela's precise class identity is further confused by her role as fairy godmother. Her deliberate manipulation of a less powerful group within the social class structure is disguised as generosity. She divines needs and miraculously fulfils them while the East Enders look on in wonder. Not unexpectedly she is received with uncritical approval by every character in the novel. Dick Coppin and Harry Goslett wish to marry her; Nelly 'simply worshipped' her, and all the workshop operatives regard her as 'a Juno, their queen'. It is never necessary for her ever to discuss her intentions with those they affect. She produces surprises, and this

enhances her own power while reducing the options of her workers:

> At eleven o'clock...Angela invited everyone to rest for half an hour. They obeyed with some surprise, and followed her with considerable suspicion, as if some mean advantage was going to be taken of them, some trick 'sprung' upon them. (ALL 89)

Their ungenerous thoughts are reproved as, in this case, a tennis court is displayed, and within weeks tennis becomes the rage in Stepney.

Her role is finally that of a prophet and the working classes become her disciples. When Nelly is hypnotised by Tom Coppins' sermon, Angela 'broke the spell'. 'She sprang towards her, caught her in her own arms, and passed her hand before her eyes'. (ALL 220) The Palace of Delight is Angela's vision made manifest, a place where the working classes can enjoy or be inspired to seek out the paths to the middle class. The biblical overtones are emphasised by the language. Her moral, spiritual and cultural rightness are fused outside specifically class terms. Harry 'marvelled greatly and asked himself what this might mean'; Angela took 'the central place, and motioned the girls to arrange themselves about her', as she prepares to tell the parable of the rich girl. After this, the age of natural goodness is ushered in in the form of a second Eden. It is with a rush of biblical rhetoric that the voice of the author and East Ender are allowed to be identified, and 'we' are allowed 'to enter in'.

Besant is a significant figure in literary history for being the first writer to bring the world of the East End to

readers, and for emphasising the ordinary, routine aspects of working class life, as Keating has pointed out. His considerable popularity, both as a novelist,8, and public figure,9, springing primarily from his association with the East End also makes him important for the insight his work can give into contemporary attitudes. His failure as a realistic novelist seems to me to be twofold. He failed to make the East End or the working classes authentic within the novel by sacrificing a realistic investigation to narrative fantasy in showing the process by which the working classes could have a better life. He failed to reveal the potential of the working classes to transcend their environment by allowing that struggle to be voiced only through middle class expectations. His failure to use an appropriate form or voice confuses the nature of the reality offered and circumscribes its independence. The reader is, therefore, forced to question the trustworthiness of the evidence he documents. An evaluative judgement that is made possible when the reader does <u>not</u> readily identify with the role s/he is cast in by the author is summed up by Walter Gibson in his analysis of reader activity:

> A bad book is a book in whose mock reader we discover a person we refuse to become.10

I think it is important to recognise that Besant's failure is an artistic one. It is easy when reading <u>All Sorts and Conditions and Men</u> today to mock its frequent stylistic infelicities and its tendentious tone, and to be alienated by its apparently simplistic optimism and blind

endorsement of cultural norms. It would be a mistake not to differentiate between the stage his work marks in contemporary awareness, which may well be outdated, and the way he chose to communicate that awareness.

Sketching the historical context of the Match Girls' Strike in 1888, which took place in the East End, Reg Beer comments that 'The social crisis of London in the mid-1880s engendered a major reorientation of middle-class attitudes towards the poor'.11 Besant anticipated this great upsurge of public debate about London and its conditions, and was in synpathy with one powerful aspect of its response. What had been indifference and ignorance was turned into an unprecedented spate of charitable and voluntary activity, 'an epidemic of self-constituted almoners of public charity'.12 Angela Messenger is a kind of prototype of many wealthy people men and women, such Octavia Hill, the housing reformer, Thomas Whitaker, temperance reformer and the Barnetts, educational reformers, who flocked to the East End to 'help' the working classes. The views expressed in All Sorts and Conditions of Men and Children of Gibeon would have been acceptable and seen as practical responses to the situation by many socially powerful people, and should not be dismissed as absurd idealism. He did not explore socialist ideas in his novels, but he was unlikely to be ignorant of them, even in the early days of the decade. His own niece, Annie Besant, was to be a leading figure in the organisation of the Match Girls' Strike in the East End in 1888.

Similarly it would be a mistake not to differentiate between the describing of the outcome of a series of events and the creating of a utopia. All Sorts and Conditions of Men was quite clearly not considered as a utopia. Besant portrayed a London he had seen and known, and working conditions he had observed for himself. Within that he told what he saw as a realistic story about how the active help of the upper classes in educating the working classes could produce constructive class cooperation. This was based on past and current practice. He was credited for being at least a part of the inspiration for the Peoples' Palace, opened on the Mile End Road in 1887, through his vision of the Palace of Delight in All Sorts and Conditions of Men. Funds flowed in for its real-life counterpart, and in its first two years, it fulfilled the kind of expectations that Besant had outlined in his novel, though its emphasis fairly raidly shifted to vocational training.13 The sense that the modern reader has that the conclusion of the novel is in a different mode from its realistic context is an artistic failure. A utopia will not be assessed for its effectiveness in describing process, but in the desirability of its vision. The difficulty with Besant's vision is not that class harmony may not be desirable, but that the processes that create it in the novel are not convincing.

Section 3

'John Law' the pseudonym for Margaret Harkness, wrote Out of Work, the third of her four novels, six years later than All Sorts and Conditions of Men.14 She also set out, as did Besant, to establish as close a relationship with the external reality of London and London life as possible. The text of Out of Work, the chief focus of this dicussion, could be used, even today, as a guide book to follow in Jos' footsteps his walks are mapped out in such detail. Superficially, the similarities between Margaret Harkness and Walter Besant are striking. She, too, gained her knowledge of the London poor through personal experience. Later, while a freelance journalist, she edited a series of articles on the moral dangers of London and the conditions of women's labour which were collected together as Tempted London and Toilers in London (1889).15 In Out of Work she makes her didactic purpose equally clear. The novel is concerned with the conditions of labour, and, very specifically, with the unemployed. Yet their insights into this common experience were so fundamentally different that the process of translation from empirical experience to literary artefact produced two quite different 'realities'.

Margaret Harkness establishes a strong realistic framework to validate the accounts of Jos' encounters with various London institutions, such as the workhouse, and uses the narrative thread to convey the nature of individual suffering produced by such encounters. In this way, she

succeeds in setting up an interaction between location and fictional character where the experience of London and the identity of Jos become interfused, creating a complementary psychological reality. This is a process the reader is enabled to share, so there is simultaneously a sense of London as a real city caught in a moment of crisis, and of a more universal experience - that of a search for self-definition.

Out of Work is set in the specific historical context of the Jubilee, the unemployment rallies and Social Democratic Federation activities of 1887, yet the novel was published only a year later in 1888. Margaret Harkness worked swiftly on material of immediate contemporary interest because of her awareness that a novelist had a special role to play in informing the public of important social concerns. Ironically, it was her defence of Walter Besant that articulated this:

> It is all very well for economists to smile because Mr Walter Besant's inquiry into the work and wages of women has collapsed - to say, 'That is what one might expect of a novelist'. By his creation of Melenda [in The Children of Gibeon], Mr. Besant first called attention to the working girl of London.16

The novelist's ability to create character and situation gives the power of suggestion over public awareness, and is as vital in its investigation of the emotions and sufferings of individuals as the more numerically comprehensive view of the sociologist. In fact, Margaret Harkness combined a deep distrust of statistics with a recognition of their importance. She commended the work of Charles Booth as early

as 1889, but, in general, feared the possibility that the 'furore for social facts' reflected a superficial response of trend setting social reformers who obscured the personal beneath statistical surveys.17 Her editorial role in Tempted London and Toilers in London, illustrates her desire for both the subjective and objective viewpoints - wage tables, lists of addresses and job descriptions are interspersed with personal histories, anecdotal digressions and conceptual generalisation. Her position was the reverse of Charles Booth's. The novelist can awaken public awareness through his/her handling of social and psychological themes. An alerted public can then respond, using scientific methodology to measure and assess the overall situation.

That this was Margaret Harkness' personal opinion, and not simply an editorial stance, is borne out by her treatment of social problems in Out of Work. The plot is of minimal interest, tracing the fate of the country artisan, Joseph Coney, who comes to London in search of work, only to return home a year later, broken and starving. The focus of the novel is London. The unity of the novel is provided by Jos himself. His experiences of the various London institutions, the London labour market and London poor form simultaneously an investigation of the psychology of an individual confronted by the size and strangeness of a huge city, and a fictionalised documentary of the reasons for unemployment, attitudes to it, and the inadequate, unjust or cruel treatment it provoked.

Again, some links with Besant's approach suggest

themselves. The documentary framework appears at first to be controlled by the author's voice in conventional mode, where authorial comment is the reader's touchstone for the moral and/or political perspective of the novel's world, as in All Sorts and Conditions of Men. Harkness frequently moves out of the narrative to comment on some specific action within it, as in the dockyard scene when men are waiting for the announcement of the labour needs for the day. When she has described the queue and Jos' expectations, she continues:

> Years hence, when children read in lesson-books about the Age of Competition, the docks will be given as an illustration of the competitive system after it reached a climax. Boys and girls will read that thousands of Englishmen fought daily at the dock gates for tickets; that starving men behind pressed so hard on starving men in front, that the latter were nearly cut in two by the iron railings which kept them from work; that contractors were mauled by hungry men; that brick-bats and stones were hurled at labour-masters by men whose families were starving. (OW 162)

The length of the passage in relation to the incident it comments on, the drawing in of facts external to the novel about dockyard labour conditions, and the emotive style all combine to give it prominence and emphasis. Sometimes, the link with the narrative is even more tenuous, and comments appear rather as outbursts of polemic triggered by the process of relating the narrative. An account of Jos' exhausted collapse on the grass in Victoria Park is followed by:

> There, then, he fell out of the ranks of the great army that goes marching on, heedless of stragglers, whose commander-in-chief is laissez-faire, upon whose banners,

> 'Grab who can,' and 'Let the devil take the hindermost' are written in large letters.
>
> And the hounds, hunger and wretchedness, scenting him, led drink and crime to their prey; for drink and crime follow close on the steps of laissez-faire's army. (OW 120)

Such interruptions of the narrative are frequent throughout that part of the novel concerned with Jos' encounter with London. Significantly, as I shall discuss later, these cease after Jos is jilted by his girlfriend Polly, and he decides to leave London.

Margaret Harkness' use of the authorial voice is, however, completely different from Besant's, and original in its total rejection of authorial ominiscience. The passages quoted above, which clearly link Margaret Harkness to a contemporary socialist viewpoint, never become an ideological imposition on the novel's world. She resisted becoming a voice for Jos and his kind. Her own comments, commiserations, attacks, pleas are juxtaposed to what is presented as the unbroken silence of those she feels for. The structure of the novel recognises that her fluency and articulation must of necessity be from outside, a significant voice but not the only voice.

If the author's voice stands outside the narrative, offering a personal rather than an omniscient viewpoint, the other voices in the text do not. While the working classes seek but fail to find a language of their own, the middle classes rush in to fill the void, attempting to convert them to any number of religious or political camps. The opening of Out of Work clearly establishes that the language of public use is itself a fiction:

> Reporters were busy at work concocting stories of the royal progress through the East End for the Monday papers; artists were preparing for the illustrated weekly papers pictures of Whitechapel as it may possibly appear in the Millenium. (OW 2)

This passage is followed by a one-sentence paragraph whose purpose appears to be to locate the narrative in a specific moment of time. However, it is soon clear that 'the bells of churches and chapels' which were 'calling upon people to forget earth and think of heaven' (OW 33), are in conspiracy with the language of the press to create yet another fiction of a future possibility which would compensate for an intolerable present. The language of the Methodist sermons, prayer books and the hymns is divorced from its original relationship with Christian concepts of moral striving, to become a code for the initiated. The tragi-comedy of the starving man's questioning of Mr Stry, the curate, makes the crucial point. The metaphor of 'corn and wine' and the literalness of ''ave you ever been 'ungry?' are not only different ways of using a common language. The metaphor has become a meaningless formula of self-congratulation. However, the hungry man's appeal to the directness of personal experience is inadequate in its undirected protest.

In A City Girl (1887), Harkness' first novel, Nell with her illegitimate child and the cripple who wishes to marry are both fobbed off in a similar way by the fanatical and inflexible Father O'Hara who dismisses their needs in talismanic Latin.18 Whichever way they turn the working classes are offered fictions to ensure their passivity. Mary Ann, the Elwin's servant, drugs herself on the popular

novelette with its tales of aristocratic love. Others are persuaded by the promises of religion. The music hall song, the so-called culture of the people, has become integrated with the voice of patriotism, alleviating the grimness of daily life with humour. Even protest songs birthed by the hunger riots have an integrative force as docile workhouse men sing to keep their spirits up:

> What will become of us
> If things go on this way,
> If honest working-men
> Are starving day by day? (OW 179)

The gap between the received language of a ruling middle class culture and the experience of the thousands of outcasts from that culture applied as much to the concepts of Socialist theory as it did to the obviously outmoded and invalidated tenets of the Wesleyan chapel. While Harkness in her own voice openly attacks existing political assumptions - the monarchy and the entire capitalist structure - the Socialist rhetoric within the narrative is ranked impartially with the rhetoric of Conservatism, Atheism and Anarchism. That Socialist ideas are clearly shared by the author does not alter the fact that Jos, listening to such phrases as 'peaceable revolution', 'class war', 'evolution of society' and 'The organisation of labour and the brotherhood of men', is taken no nearer to self-expression. (OW 65-68) The end of that particular speech marks the end of that chapter for, not surprisingly, Jos has no interest and no response.

The gap between political discourse and the private thoughts of the working classes is so great that no

political speeches in the novel elicit a response of any kind from working men or the unemployed. The one exception occurs during the Trafalgar Square unemployed demonstrations. The location of Trafalgar Square is crucial in several ways. Here, it is presented as the recognised location of historical events, as well as the manifestation of British military pride and supremacy. During the demonstration, Harkness borrows a metaphor from the National Gallery which forms one side of the Square when she describes the soldiers as forming a 'frieze', and so underlines the State's role as a defender of its cultural norms against the inroads of the working classes. It is here that a single, unnamed working man finds his voice. He rejects the public voice of press and parliament, and uses his tools as symbols of a working man's dignity and integrity, holding them up for the crowd to see. His demand for the recognition of his value in his own terms meets with immediate response from his working class audience. However, the delicate balance between dignity and degradation in the public identity of the working man is cleverly juxtaposed with the question raised by the onlookers:

> Did the genuine unemployed come to these daily demonstrations, or were the demonstrators loafers who would not work, vagrants who wanted to play on the sympathies of the public, scum that must be allowed to die like dogs in the streets by the order of Political Economists? (OW 197)

Here, Margaret Harkness made explicit the conflict already noted in relation to Charles Booth. 'Loafer' and 'vagrant', current moral terms for those out of work, and the

pejorative word 'scum', were balanced against the relatively new concept of the 'unemployed' - men whose lack of work was not their own responsibility.19

This depiction of the dilemma of the working classes presented Margaret Harkness with a considerable artistic challenge. It is the way she confronts it that marks her work out as essentially different from that of Walter Besant. In suggesting the nature of the political and social disadvantages from which the working classes suffered, she also ran the risk of suggesting the kind of despair and impotence that led to Engels' famous attack on this novel. (See below, p. 327) Yet to suggest an answer would be artificially to construct a language and an identity for them. Instead, by describing Jos' explorations of London, his encounters with its institutions and his experiences of its labour market, Margaret Harkness allows London to emerge as the chief influence in forming and, therefore, a significant means of describing Jos' consciousness. For much of the novel, this approach reveals the interaction of city and individual. At the point when Jos can no longer be integrated into the city's structures, his loss of self and his despair are described in terms of alienation from those structures that created him. The power and appropriateness of this approach becomes painfully and profoundly clear in the latter part of the novel after Jos has become homeless.

The early part of the novel is set in Whitechapel, whose streets and buildings are carefully and precisely described. As a working man, defined by the tools of his

trade and their value on the labour market, Jos has always assessed himself from the viewpoint of the external world. He is never introspective. He has had no need to be, and, therefore, no means. The outward sign of his crisis when he can no longer draw satisfactorily on those old definitions is his move to the West End. The marking of a gulf between the working classes and the middle classes with the literal and metaphorical distance between the East End and the West End is familiar in novels of this period. Margaret Harkness had already explored it herself in telling the love story of a young East End woman for a middle class man who lived in Kensington in A City Girl. The gulf is increased by the inability of individuals of each class to see the reality of those of a different class. When Arthur Grant comes to the East End he sees Nell as a 'picture' and it is this image he courts. When Nell goes to the West End, she sees Arthur, his wife and child 'framed' in the window of their Kensington house, and she admiringly accepts this image of middle-class domesticity. Similarly, when Jos moves to the West End, he is entering an alien world where he can only have confirmed his own feelings of worthlessness. It is at this point, when he experiences the lowest depths of rejection and starvation, that he ceases even to hear the rhetorics around him. The voices in the text, including the author's, are silenced. Jos has to find his own voice or be annihilated.

Jos' path to Trafalgar Square is dictated by another meaning. Trafalgar Square is in the heart of the West End. It is the home of Nelson's Column and the National Gallery.

Yet, traditionally, the Square belonged to the people. When Jos goes there he is following a last hope that his plight be recognised in the places of power. The moment when he takes up his place there among London's homeless marks a distinct shift in the style of the novel. It is here that Jos is forced to confront himself for the first time. A crucial sequence begins:

> Big Ben struck twelve.
> Then the square began to fill rapidly with people. Tall policemen took up their station in it as sentinels. (OW 170-173)

From that moment, as Trafalgar Square moves out of time and space, cut off from the surrounding city, Jos enters the prison of his own consciousness. For him it is the first moment of his life where he has nothing to affirm his existence in the external social, working world. Here he has only the place and the prostrate, deliberate unconsciousness of the sleeping 'outcasts', glad to abandon their awareness. His gaze into the fountain compels him to see his irrelevance in an uncaring universe. His embittered laugh bounces off those monuments of England's glory, Nelson's Column and the National Gallery. Unable to relate to or be accepted by any existing criteria, in his ensuing dream he glimpses total extinction:

> He had seen the old clergyman, John Datchett, standing by an open grave, reading out of a book. Some one had said 'It's right to look in on the coffin,' and looking into that yawning pit that held his mother...he had seen ---- (OW 172-173)

With his realisation of his separateness and insignificance comes the collapse of faith, of a sense of social order, of

social language. He confronts the abyss that threatens individual consciousness and uniqueness. Time reasserts itself as Big Ben strikes five o'clock, but Jos' awareness has changed. Big Ben no longer marks the hours of a working day, but 'births and deaths in seconds and minutes'.

With 'His Last Night in London', this knowledge reasserts itself, precipitated by Jos' meeting with his former girl-friend, Polly. Her rejection of him throws him again into that sense of loss of self he experienced in Trafalgar Square. The images he sees are absorbed into his inner consciousness as a metaphor of his alienation as he wanders through the streets of London, once so familiar, now unnamed and unidentified:

> The streets swarmed with men, women, and children, the open doors of the houses showed rooms teeming with inhabitants; but he was as lonely there as in a sepulchre. (OW 237)

With the ringing of the church bells which enter his mind as the bells of the church of his childhood, all contact with external reality is severed, and with it his own consciousness to which it is so closely linked. '"Maybe," he said to himself, "I'm dying."' (OW 239)

This knowledge, gained through his experience of London conditions, and embodied in London streets, modifies all previous experiences. The pleasant scenes of the country, treasured throughout his stay in London, are now a series of unrelated objects: 'nothing but fields, trees, hedges and the grey sky that seemed to shut the earth in with a heavy curtain'. Such revelations cannot be obliterated. Jos never finds the words his experiences demand, and he dies on his

mother's tombstone under the epitaph 'Silent and Safe'. The final lines of the novel mark the negation of a physical body, but, more significantly, of an individual history and individual aspirations:

> 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,' said the priest.
> This was the end.
> So he came home again. (OW 280)

Out of Work, praised in its own time for its realism, offers more than an illusion of reality intended to engage public sympathy. The objectivity with which Margaret Harkness handled her material persuades the reader of the truthfulness of her perception of London in the 1880s. The political implications of this picture, and Margaret Harkness' contribution to the development of a Socialist novel will be considered later. (See below, pp. 302-310) At this point, it is only necessary to recognise two particular aspects of her achievement. The first is that her emphasis on the importance of environment in human development enabled her to reveal the process of the contemporary conflict between social identity and personal identity, and to convey the struggle of the working class consciousness to express itself within the environment that so powerfully conditioned and controlled it. The second is that in charting the failure of this struggle, Margaret Harkness went beyond an indictment of specific social practices, to create a coherent critique of the processes of urbanisation.

Section 4

Like Walter Besant and Margaret Harkness, the common denominators between the novels of George Gissing written in the 1880s, and the writings of many of his contemporaries are self-evident. In choosing material concerned with the working classes, the conditions of employment and poverty, and the slums of London as the novels' locations, he apparently reflected the contemporary fascination with such questions, and appeared to be allied to those whose writing was largely motivated by social and political considerations. The motives for his realistic portrayals of urban degradation were argued about,20, and his attitudes as understood by his reviewers were sometimes criticised,21, but the subject itself was becoming acceptable and increasingly familiar to the reading public as we have already seen.

More specifically, much of the more extravagant rhetoric of his early novels echoed the common language of outrage and indignation noted in the journalism of the time. Out of context, it might sometimes be hard to differentiate between this and certain passages from The Nether World for instance, a novel written at the end of the 1880s and the last of Gissing's so-called proletarian novels.22 It is significant that this novel, his seventh in ten years and commonly regarded as a greater artistic achievement than the earlier novels, in some ways appears closest to the rhetoric of George Sims and Andrew Mearns. In the only novel where he

chose to write solely about the struggles of the poor and the very poor, he frequently used popular terminology. East London is 'the pest-stricken regions...a city of the damned',(NW 164), and the inhabitants, the 'hapless spawn of diseased humanity'. (NW 130) Darwinian concepts abound. Clem Peckover is seen as victorious in the battle of the survival of the fittest - 'a rank evilly-fostered growth' nurtured by 'The putrid soil of that nether world...'. (NW 8) Descriptions of the courts, staircases and rooms show the same perception as Sims and Mearns. 'In the recesses of dim byways, where sunshine and free air are forgotten things, where families herd together...', he wrote about Clerkenwell. (NW 11) A reader in 1889 might never have visited Clerkenwell, but he would very likely be able to recognise its literary counterpart. As Gissing writes: 'Needless to burden description with further detail; the slum was like any other slum...'. (NW 74)

These superficial similarities to his contemporaries tended in his own day to obscure his individual achievement for they invited superficial responses. Worse, they invited inappropriate ones. Again and again, the themes and methods of the early novels were read as more or less successful propaganda for social reform. The growing sensitivity of the public conscience plus the fear of social disorder, stimulated by religious and philanthropic tracts and nourished by overtly didactic literature such as Walter Besant's novels, established a mode of response that was hard to shake. Whether reviewers' interpretations of

Gissing's novels were favourable or unfavourable the usual criteria were the literal truthfulness of the facts presented in the novel and the relationship of the novel to the purposes of social reform. The accuracy of Gissing's descriptions of poverty and of poverty stricken areas was almost totally accepted, and emphasised again and again as a major aspect of the particular novel's merit. Whether he was 'truthful' judged against first hand experience of the reviewer or 'truthful' when judged against the popularly accepted image of slum London is hard to know. Again, it is The Nether World that highlights this response. 'They [the poor] are described with absolute and relentless truth,' claims one reviewer.23 'The story...is first and foremost a study - faithful and daringly graphic - of life as it is...' claimed another,24, and even the hostile review of Archdeacon Farrar agreed that the descriptions were 'true to fact'.25

Gissing himself clearly distinguished between the material he used and his artistic intentions: '...the idea of the book...is very greatly directed to social problems, principally the condition and prospects of the poorest classes' he wrote to his brother about Workers in the Dawn.26 After reading the first reviews, however, he commented of one, 'But he treats it too much as if it were a mere polemical pamphlet, and not a work of art, as which, of course, I desire it to be judged'. (Letters 74) He expanded on this idea in the same letter where he suggests that artistic achievement is the mediation between the facts of

working class life and the reader: 'It is a most shocking thing that genuine writing, let it express what opinions it may, should be offensive to anyone'. Yet again, nine years later, he was to reiterate this point to his sister, Ellen, about The Nether World: 'As to The Nether World, it is not easy for me to realise the horror it seems to excite in you. Of course I am not in the habit of thinking of it in that way: to me the first thing is vigour of artistic treatment'. (Letters 283).

There is no doubt that in his earliest novels Gissing does not help his own cause, and that artistic weakness in a novel such as Workers in the Dawn (1880) leaves the reader grasping for a resolution that is ludicrously unfulfilled by Arthur Golding's leap into the Niagara Falls at the end of the novel. Uneven characterisation from the caricatured curate, Mr Whiffle, the idealised middle class Helen Norman and the stereotyped working class slattern that Carrie becomes, gives the reader the sense of being deliberately manipulated. To what end is harder to grasp. Yet, easy as it is to criticise Workers in the Dawn, the first of the published novels, it does 'leave on the mind a certain "obsession"'.27 It is in grasping and understanding how this 'obsession' is created that we come nearest to being able to read Gissing's novels objectively.

Any attempt to differentiate between aesthetic and thematic satisfaction in novels whose characters, narratives and locations are drawn from the context of controversial and problematic social questions requires a further

distinction between a writer's political and historical consciousness. Adrian Poole in Gissing in Context argues that what he sees as the limitations of The Nether World are caused by Gissing's failure to take into account the progress in working class organisation that was happening contemporaneously with his writing of the novel. Having pointed out that the publication of The Nether World took place in the same year as the Dock Strike, that is 1889, Poole compares Ben Tillett, the dockers' leader, to John Hewett, the failed socialist orator of Clerkenwell Green. He goes on:

> These are the possibilities that Gissing refuses to contemplate, even as they were happening around him in the London of the late eighties, so dogmatic is his insistence on a psychology of inevitable egotism.28

Yet it seems surprising that Poole appears to expect such a specific relationship between a fictional character and a contemporary political figure, and to judge Gissing wanting when he does not find it. In fact, Poole's discussion of the novel as a whole belies the apparent assumption that the truth embodied in a novel should be limited in function by the political circumstances that surround it. Nevertheless, if Gissing was indeed blinding himself to maintain some personal theory intact, this could well limit the possibilities of his own aesthetic, as we have already observed happening in Walter Besant's All Sorts and Conditions of Men. I do not feel that this is the case.

Gissing's diary entry for July 8th 1888, during the time he was writing The Nether World throws an intriguing

sidelight onto this relationship between political consciousness and the artist. It begins, 'In morning to Mile End Waste, for a strike meeting of Bryant and May's match girls. Very few of the girls present'.29 The strike of the match girls was an extremely significant event in the history of the organisation of unskilled labour, beginning as a spontaneous response of solidarity with dismissed employees. Gissing was clearly aware of this, since he attended the meeting, recorded the names of the speakers and later in the day went on to another strike meeting in Regent's Park. However, his apparently casual comment about the fewness of the working classes present and his surrendering of a shilling to the strike fund out of guilt rather than out of solidarity argues for his fundamental lack of sympathy with their cause. The second part of the entry is significant: 'On the way home had an experience familiar enough and horribly distressing...the plot of my story....would not do. Sat late, brooding and had a troubled night'. The immediate turn of contemporary events was intellectually interesting, but it did not engage his imaginative vision, nor supplant the immediate demands of artistic creation.

What then was the significance of Gissing's deep involvement with the London of his time? He not only drew on the material of personal experience gained in the slum areas of London as a young man, he also researched with care and throughness as his letters and his diary testify. The Lambeth of Thyrza was the result of many hours spent walking

round and observing the Lambeth area during the time he was writing the novel, as was the Clerkenwell of The Nether World.30 He clearly shared the collective consciousness of London as an important, varied and profoundly disturbing experience. Like Margaret Harkness, he recognised the controlling and influencing effect of an urban environment. He was aware, as she was, of the political implications of urban structures and of the significance of specific contemporary events. But Gissing had broader and different concerns from most of his contemporaries. These were not necessarily about London, but London helped him to explore them by providing him with a means of perception that took him beyond the immediate social problems raised by the processes of urbanisation.

To return to the distinction between political and historical consciousness. Gissing was interested in this city at this time partly because it gave him insight into the structures of social relationships, but more because it gave the tools with which to explore the complexities of the modern consciousness. 'In the mood of artistic contemplation the will is destroyed, self is eliminated, the world of phenomena resolves itself into pictures of absolute significance...'.31 He saw in those 'phenomena' of urbanisation a paradigm of the modern personality for which the topography and patterns of London furnished the descriptions. How this began to develop in some of the novels of the eighties, and Thyrza in particular, is what I want to discuss.

The starting point for understanding the creative growth takes us back to the London of Charles Booth. Just as Booth was consciously making out a new sociological method for the description of urban conditions, so Gissing was conscious of working towards an appropriate mode of expression for his vision of the individual who would emerge from them. As John Goode has pointed out, they both confronted the same city, shared some of the same concepts of the processes of urbanisation and required a sense of distance for their work.32 For Booth there was the detachment of the social scientist; for Gissing the detachment of the artist. It is interesting that the society of the time was prepared for the sociological objectivity of Charles Booth which gave it access to an understanding and apprehension of a previously vaguely grasped but urgent problem, but not for an equivalent artistic objectivity which appeared to offer further problems rather than solutions. While believing his approach to be essential for ordering the information about the sprawling areas of London, Booth was aware that what he presented was the 'dry bones' which it would take 'a subtler and nobler alchemy' to bring to life.33 This is precisely what Gissing does, not by telling fictional histories with embroidery in a 'realistic' fashion, nor by deconstructing Booth's methodology and using the material for didactic reasons (which is what Booth probably meant) but by recognising the implications of Booth's city for literary expression.

The accumulated detail of the Poverty series of Labour

and Life of the People leaves a powerful impression of four dominating factors in working class London life: housing, demarcation of areas within the city, employment practice and numbers. These are all linked at three levels through their complex relationship with the needs of the individual, their existence as part of a historical city and their shaping by an existing ideology. Housing, for example, is an essential for survival, so the having or not having of a room to sleep and eat in is a crucial structuring element in an individual's life, as well as a potential space for rest and personal happiness. A second dimension is the abstraction, 'housing' which is, in fact, the reality of streets, courts and alleys where rented buildings exist. It is equally a form of capitalist investment where rents are related to the maximum possible outlay from the average wage, and tenure is only assured by a regular payment of rent money. Booth recognised this conflict between personal and impersonal definitions in his comment on 'gardens' and 'rents', as did Mearns in his simple statement, '...people must live somewhere'. (BC 69)

In Workers in the Dawn Gissing explored this interlinking of London realities but invested it with a new significance. It is in this early novel we can see how Gissing's use of the room and the street becomes more than a simple symbolic equivalent for the private and the public life in his attempt to convey the dynamics of the relationship between Arthur Golding and Carrie Mitchell. The parts of Workers in the Dawn that are concerned with

Carrie's and Arthur's relationship seem to me to be some of the most successful in the novel. The way in which Gissing brings about an encounter between the contemporary perspective of the lodging house with its tenant/landlord ideology, the needs of male/female friendships and the London landscape to suggest more fundamental conflicts points forward to the more sustained and sophisticated treatment of Thyrza.

The room is the known area within which Gissing explored all the emotional range of the inner life for which it was a controlling, shaping influence. The room is also the burden of the wage-earning tenant, an impersonal space to be changed at will, and an enforced isolation marking off the drama of individual lives from the concern of others. It is at once separate from and part of the street. The room is not alone in being '...the locus for all the most intense emotions'.34 Moments of crisis experienced inside are explored outside on the streets. The confrontations with oneself and others within a room are paralleled by the confrontation with the urban landscape outside. The relief sought in the publicness and activity of the streets is delusory. They lead back to the starting point and create a sense of helplessness as a room creates a sense of frustration. Here Gissing lays the foundation of language appropriate to an expression of the 'oppression and ferment' noted by Edward Bertz in 1889 as being 'the general spirit of the modern age'.35 It also implies the accompanying mental and spiritual 'paralysis' which Gissing's aesthetic

increasingly came to embody.

In Thyrza, his fifth novel, Gissing explored this sense of paralysis with more coherence and power.36 As a theme it is articulated by Egremont at the very beginning of the novel. He expresses his fears that he may become, '...one of the men, never so common as nowadays, who spend their existence in canvassing the possibilities that lie before them and delay action till they find that the will is paralysed...'. (TH 11) It is this aspect of Thyrza and Gissing's treatment of it that I want to concentrate on here.

The narrative of Thyrza deals with the love of a working class girl and a socially conscious upper middle class gentleman. Thyrza and Egremont meet as a result of Egremont's philanthropic schemes in Lambeth. His desire to help working class men be educated and his love for Thyrza cut across the personal and public aspirations of Gilbert Grail. The themes raised by the narrative deal with important contemporary issues - the relationship of the classes, the controversy about the value of culture to the working classes and the nature of individual aspiration. Yet, as we discovered in Workers in the Dawn, it is not the narrative that completes or resolves those themes. Thyrza's and Egremont's love temporarily crosses the class divide but never explores the nature of class relationships. It is presented superficially and conventionally as a 'grand passion' which ends with Egremont's abandoning her.

Similarly, Egremont's lectures to a selected band of

men on English literature and philosophy contributes little to our understanding of the social significance of such work, or to the appropriateness or value of education to the working classes. In narrative terms, its achievement is to provide the meeting point for Egremont and Grail and, later, Thyrza. Within the narrative, the love affair then assumes importance and is the cause of the tragedy, divisions and despair which are thereby diverted to emotions and events extrinsic to the issues that appear to have been offered as significant. Both as a romantic novel about an abandoned woman and as a realistic analysis of specific class issues, Thyrza's narrative is incomplete.

Yet, when reading Thyrza there is a sense that these themes are satisfactorily completed. By 'completed' I mean to suggest that in Thyrza we can observe a process whereby the plot, with its emphasis on cause and effect, becomes inadequate to convey certain modes of consciousness, and is gradually made redundant. Perhaps this is what Gissing meant when he agreed with Bertz that Thyrza had no plot, continuing: 'Alas, how little these reviewers comprehend (apprehend, I should say), of my real meaning. In truth I think of very little but Art, pure and simple...'. (Letters 193)

In the first place, Gissing never allowed Lambeth to be a construct of the characters' response to it, though this is apparently allowed some credibility early in the novel. 'I remember how mournful the rain used to be in the London streets,' comments Annabel. A moment later Paula says, '"How

gloomy the rain is here [the Lake District]! One doesn't mind it in London..."' (TH 22), and the reader accepts this as a revelation about character, and not about the nature of London. Lambeth Bridge, on the other hand, is used as the focal means of undermining the characters' creative contribution to their environment. The Romantic concept -

> ...of all the mighty world
> Of eye , and ear, both what they half-create,
> And what perceive.37

is made nonsense by Lambeth's determined fixity. Excited by Grail's retelling of the story of Thomas More, Thyrza decides that 'She would go and stand on the bridge and think of it'. (TH 64) The area in which she lives is apparently still fragmentarily invested with the romance of history as she glimpses a dimension of London outside her unchanging daily acquaintance with it. Later this faint consciousness of a historical perspective is shown to be an aberration of the imagination when, deserted by Egremont, she falls down at the entrance to the bridge and lays 'her head...against something hard and cold,' - the intractable matter of the city she knows. (TH 259)

It is this encounter with the inertness of external urban realities that makes the description of Gilbert Grail's visit to the bridge so powerful. Jacob Korg in a detailed analysis of this passage claims that '...the various sights and sounds of the night over the river become the counterpart of his sense of elation', and he calls this 'the language of external experience'.38 In fact there is no way that Gilbert's happiness on being offered the position

of librarian in Egremont's library invests the actual scene before him with beauty, nor does the description have the function of an objective correlative as he claims to Gilbert's mood of the moment. From the first the scene exists separate and inert. It is 'Unsightliest of all bridges crossing Thames', '...the entrance to some fastness of ignoble misery,' and Lambeth Palace is 'dark, lifeless'. (TH 112) The bells are full of 'clangorous discord' and the barge's sail is 'dark and ghastly'. (TH 113) It is to this scene that Gilbert Grail is drawn by '...some power he did not understand...where he could best realise this great joy that had befallen him'. (TH 113) The irony is horrible. His happiness does not modify the world around him; it is merely an unconscious rebellion against the prevailing resignation of his mind, and the prevailing ugliness of the Lambeth streets.

The sense of the Bridge's independence is emphasised, too, when Egremont crosses it on his visit to Bunce after his decision to renounce Thyrza. It is not necessary for Gissing to describe the scene again - it is unchanged. However, unlike Walter Besant's repetitive descriptions which confirm the irrelevance and manageableness of environment, Gissing confirms its intractable dominance. He simply reminds the reader that it is the same scene that confronted Grail, but 'To Egremont the darkening scene was in accord with the wearied misery which made his life one dull pain'. (TH 253) Fortunately for Egremont, Lambeth is not the world he has to confront; its apparent accordance

with his mood is fortuitous. For Grail it is otherwise, as it is for Thyrza. This is made explicit in the parting of Egremont and Thyrza where the passivity of the bridge, at first a romantic viewpoint, then unchanging matter, becomes an actively controlling force. Thyrza cannot cross the bridge - it marks the limits of both her inner and outer worlds.

This view of Lambeth Bridge is extended to the world of Lambeth itself, created with careful topographical accuracy. The reader begins with an illusion of space that is rapidly eroded. The realisation of how small the area is within which the characters move comes as a surprise, as the significance of the endless repetition of the names of Paradise Street, Newport Street and Walnut Tree Walk become clear. These streets exist between the River Thames at one end and the railway viaduct which cuts across Paradise Street and forms one side of Newport Street at the other. The Lambeth of Thyrza, respectable and unexceptional enough, is an example of the type of area cut off by natural and industrial features described by Charles Booth. Such areas were, in Thyrza and, later, The Nether World, to become Gissing's means of describing that state of mind they both created and paralleled, full of futile activity and confined self-expression. Gilbert's factory, the girls' hat factory, the lecture hall and the new library are all within a few minutes walk of the characters' homes. The recording of walks to work, shopping, entertainment and social visits creates the external sense of constant activity and human

intercourse that is belied by the accumulative effect of topographical detail which finally invests the area with an imploding dynamism of its own that controls the activity and intercourse and confines it.

This is emphasised by the fact that the cultural philanthropist, Egremont, lived across the bridge in Great Russell Street, and Dalmaine, M.P. for Vauxhall and a director of several factories in Lambeth, had chambers in Westminster - 'Lambeth was only just over the water; he liked to be near, for it was one of his hobbies...to keep thoroughly cognisant of the affairs of his borough...'. (TH 128) However, for those born in Lambeth such a perspective was impossible. To leave is either to be lost, as Thyrza is when she runs away - searching for her seems an irrelevant and impossible activity - or to enter some vague and unspecified unknown. Trains might take Thyrza to Eastbourne, and she even contemplates following Egremont to Ullswater, but they could not help her to leave the world that had created her, any more than Lambeth Bridge itself could.

Within this confined area the roads all interlock forming a rabbit warren network through which the characters endlessly move backwards and forwards. The streets are as claustrophobic as the rooms. At every turn there is a familiar face to be encountered, more often than not reluctantly. As Thyrza faints when leaving the public house, Ackroyd is there to witness her shame. When she visits Egremont in the library, she is observed by Bowers. When Egremont chases Thyrza, he encounters Grail, and when Grail,

sickened by his sense of loneliness leaves Lambeth Bridge, he bumps into Ackroyd and Totty Nancarrow. Exposed to each other, yet largely unknown for their inner fears and joys, they form a community within which they constantly seek privacy even while longing for human contact. Ackroyd uses the accidental meeting to register his coolness: 'Till he got quite near he affected not to have seen; then, without a smile, he...walked past, his pace accelerated'. (TH 20) Thyrza, seeking Egremont, fears it: 'Any moment Totty might come - one of the Bowers might pass'. (TH 257) Grail shuns it: 'Gilbert stopped...for he did not care to pass them and be recognised'. (TH 113)

Otherwise, as is characteristic of Gissing's novels, crowds of people are curiously absent. The crowds of a London street appear as distanced groups, anonymous masses unrelated to or concerned with the individual histories being acted out. They are the 'throng' that the characters move about among, singled out only occasionally as the individual's subconscious seizes on a particular image and so thrusts its significance into the conscious. This is the case with Arthur Golding and the prostitutes in Workers in the Dawn. It is again when Gilbert Grail notices the crippled girl as he listens to the street music, or when Thyrza and Lydia, quarrelling for the first time, hear the coarse language of the quarrelling couple in the street. Predominantly, the impression is of emptiness. The streets, interlinked and cut off to form a self-referring unit, may imply community but create isolation, control movement and

embody stasis. The process of delineating a map of a small area of Lambeth and tracking the movements of the characters within it creates apparently proliferating possibilities and recurring dead-ends.

In Thyrza, Gissing also elaborated on his treatment of streets and rooms explored first in Workers in the Dawn. In this novel, their specific functions are merged. They are almost interchangeable for they both embody a similar dualism - a confrontation with oneself that may be a reassurance or a torture. At first it is the positive aspects that are stressed. Gilbert Grail's room is a pleasant, harmonious expression of himself, though its total isolation from all visitors is clearly a precarious refuge for an affectionate man. When Egremont visits it, he is impressed by its serenity and comfort. Similarly, the Trents' room is a refuge from the world of work, an area where personal identity can be established and where their love can be expressed. However, as the two families become more enmeshed, the rooms they inhabit begin to define both the physical nearness and emotional distance between them as well as between their hopes and the reality they have to face. Returning to her room after her pursuit of Egremont, Thyrza '...with a terrified look at the Grails' door, ran past and up the stairs...'. (TH 269) The proximity of the Grails becomes a burden to her: 'All morning Thyrza had sat upstairs by herself', and later, after her second meeting with Egremont she '... ran upstairs. It was an unspeakable relief to be alone'. (TH 218) But this aloneness is also a

torture. She attempts to push the confines of her room outwards to accommodate her disturbed emotional state, by 'walking' her room as she had previously walked the streets of Lambeth. Having paced all the space she inhabits, she realises, 'She could not sit here all through the afternoon'. (TH 219) This ambiguity always remains. After her parting with Egremont; after her return from the Caledonian Road, her room is a refuge to which she clings. Yet it is always an intolerable constraint, and her restlessness cannot be contained within it.

In Thyrza we are made aware, then, of the way traditional plots based on concerns more or less to do with the processes of urbanisation and their accompanying conflicts of class and culture seem to run parallel to a language emerging from a detached observation of those same processes which struggle to express concerns of identity and personal meaning. It is as if the urban structures, destructive and disorientating, replace the social structures of Church and state, so that to contemplate them is to see the situation of the people in a moment of history and to perceive the forming of a state of mind which will be the condition of man's intellectual and spiritual development in the future. The immediate social issues create the metaphysical need to define a meaning for existence where that existence is dominated by 'material omnipotence'. (TH 134)

This approach makes Gissing more akin to a writer such as Thomas Hardy than with the slum realist novelists he is

more usually linked with. Both writers drew on the material they knew and understood, Gissing on the urban landscape and Hardy on the rural. Gissing anticipated the Wessex of Jude the Obscure, published in 1895, where the countryside is perceived as a network of roads and railway lines. These appear to imply a widening of horizons and the increase of human communication, but actually spell isolation and aimlessness. Sue and Jude travel and retravel the paths, encountering again and again each other, Arabella and Phillotson until they appear to inhabit a huis clos in which only they exist, while other people form groups distanced by collective names - the undergraduates, the itinerants, the School Board. Gissing's London and Hardy's Wessex are drawn together in this common illustration of a prevalent spiritual condition.

The common sense of a realistic London in the novels of Walter Besant, Margaret Harkness and George Gissing does not go beyond the naming of streets. Whether, in factual terms, they share more common ground than that can only be proved by reference to other contemporary sources and not from within the texts. It is the way those facts are used in the texts that either heightens or diminishes the reader's sense of their 'realism'. Besant could harness realistic description with a fable of social harmony. In doing so, he tapped the hopes and convictions of many people of his day. Margaret Harkness on the other hand allowed the fiction to emerge from the realistic material. London becomes the visible expression of a social system that inhibits and

controls language and therefore thought. The coherence of her portrait of a city gives the novel considerable force and authenticity. Gissing started from a similar artistic position of objectivity. But Gissing's aims were broader, and his achievement profounder. Gissing's London is partly the deterministic hell that John Goode argues in his essay on The Nether World,39, but not in the sense that makes these proletarian novels simply the pessimistic social comment that their very specific link between environment and personality conveyed in Gissing's own time. 'What the modern novel requires is an extension of subject matter, in depth as well as breadth: it seeks after new themes' wrote Edward Bertz in 1889 after reading The Nether World. 'How could we expect literature to lag behind these universal changes? It has to incorporate the great problems of our time'.40 Those great problems had been identified much earlier by Gissing himself in 'The Hope of Pessimism':

> ...who, awake to the fact that old faiths are failing us...look darkly wondering into the world's future, and speculate anxiously as to the effect upon men's every-day life of intellectual conditions so different from those under which modern civilisation grew to consistency.41

It was this broader historical condition that Gissing was struggling to define in the novels he wrote during the 1880s. With the move away from subject matter concerned with working classes in slums and conditions of poverty in the novels he wrote in the 1890s, it became increasingly clear that Gissing's central concern was the process by which the individual sought self-definition within social

structures that acted against it. Besant wrote a fiction to convey a specific social message about the possibility of class harmony. Margaret Harkness offered an objectified perception of London for her readers to evaluate. The 'alchemy' Gissing worked was to make an account of his perception of London of the 1880s the language that described his concept of the modern consciousness.

Notes

1. Walter Besant, All Sorts and Conditions of Men (London, 1897). First published in 1882. Afterwards referred to in the text as ALL followed by the page numbers. See List of Abbreviations. The Children of Gibeon (London, 1886).

2. See F.W. Boege, 'Sir Walter Besant: Novelist', parts 1 and 2, Nineteenth Century Fiction (March 1956), pp. 249 -280 and (June 1956), pp. 32-60, for an account of Besant's involvement in public affairs.

3. P.J. Keating, The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, pp. 93-124.

4. Saturday Review, 27 November 1886, p. 710.

5. Walter Besant wrote a survey of the entire London area which was completed in 1904. East London was published in 1901.

6. Walter Besant, Autobiography of Sir Walter Besant (London, 1902), pp. 224-249. See also The Art of Fiction (London, 1884).

7. The Diary of Beatrice Webb. Volume 1 1873 - 1892: Glitter Around and Darkness Within, edited by Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie (London, 1982), p. 219.

8. All Sorts and Conditions of Men was reprinted five times in the two years following its publication.

9. Walter Besant was knighted in 1895.

10. Walter Gibson cited in Jane P. Tompkins, Reader-Response from Formalism to Post-Structuralist Criticism (Baltimore and London, 1980), p. xi

11. Reg Beer, Matchgirls' Strike 1888: The Struggle Against Sweated Labour in London's East End, National Museum of Labour History Pamphlet 2 (London, 1980), p. 8.

12. The Times, 14 July 1888, p. 3.

13. In the first six months after its opening 600,000 people were recorded as having visited the People's Palace. Its weekly magazine, the Palace Journal had a regular circulation of 4,000, and at the end of two years as many as 2,500,000 people had attended the various classes and functions.

14. Margaret Harkness (pseudonym John Law), Out of Work (London, 1888). Afterwards referred to in the text as OW followed by the page numbers. See List of Abbreviations.

15. Margaret Harkness, editor, Tempted London and Toilers in London (London, 1889).

16. Margaret Harkness, Toilers in London, p. 259.

17. Margaret Harkness, Toilers in London, p. 215.

18. Margaret Harkness (pseudonym John Law), A City Girl: A Realistic Story (London, 1890), pp. 132-134. Afterwards referred to in the text as CG followed by the page number. First published 1887. See List of Abbreviations.

19. The earliest recorded use of 'unemployed' as a substantive in the Oxford English Dictionary is from the Pall Mall Gazette, 10 May 3/2, 1882. 'Unemployment' came later, not being in common use until as late as c.1895.

20. For example, read F.W. Farrar's review of The Nether World in Contemporary Review, 61 (September 1889), pp. 370-380, in Gissing: The Critical Heritage, edited by Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London and Boston, 1972), pp. 141-146.

21. For example, read Edith Sichel on Thyrza and Demos, Murray's Magazine, 3, xvi (April 1888), pp. 506-518. This article also contains a discussion of Walter Besant's All Sorts and Conditions of Men and The Children of Gibeon.

22. George Gissing, The Nether World, edited and with an introduction by Walter Allen (London, 1973). Afterwards referred to in the text as NW followed by the page number. First published 1889. See List of Abbreviations.

23. Unsigned Review, Guardian, XL1V, 1 (29 May 1889), p. 845.

24. Unsigned Review, Court Journal (27 April 1889), p. 590.

25. F.G. Farrar in Gissing: The Critical Heritage, p. 143.

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28. Adrian Poole, Gissing in Context (London, 1975), p. 96.

29. George Gissing, London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist, edited by Pierre Coustillas (Brighton, 1978), p. 213.

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31. George Gissing, 'The Hope of Pessimism' (1882), in George Gissing, Essays and Fictions, edited by Pierre Coustillas (Baltimore and London, 1970), p. 95.

32. John Goode, George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction. For the discussion of the relationship between the London of Charles Booth and that of George Gissing see pp. 93-99.

33. Charles Booth, Labour and Life of the People, Final Volume (London, 1902), p. 216.

34. Adrian Poole, Gissing in Context, p. 45.

35. Eduard Bertz, 'George Gissing: ein Real-Idealist', Deutsche Presse, 3 Nov. 1889 - 17 Nov. 1889 in three installments. Translated by David and Hedda Thatcher in Gissing: The Critical Heritage, pp. 149-156.

36. George Gissing, Thyrza, edited and with an introduction by Jacob Korg (Brighton, 1974). Afterwards referred to in the text as TH followed by the page number. First published 1887. See List of Abbreviations.

37. William Wordsworth, 'Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', lines 106-108, p. 170.

38. Jacob Korg, Introduction to Thyrza, p. xiii.

39. John Goode, 'The Nether World', in Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Critical Essays on some English and American Novels, edited by D. Howard, J. Lucas and J. Goode (London, 1966), pp. 207-242.

40. Eduard Bertz, in Gissing: The Critical Heritage, p. 150.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE SUBURBS : 'A NEW MIDDLE CLASS' AND THE LITERATURE OF HOUSING, 1886 - 1900

Section 1

If contemporary discussions of the dramatic events of the inner city during the 1880s had raised questions that threatened existing moral and political structures, the bulk of the literature of the suburbs charts the laying of the dust, and the re-establishing of equilibrium as sections of the middle classes counter attacked.

The expansion of the suburbs had been commented on much earlier in the century.1 In the 1870s they had still belonged to the middle classes - to wealthy, influential men such as John Ruskin, who lived at Denmark Hill, and William Wilberforce, at Clapham. Such men lived in detached houses in their own grounds in any of the many desirable rural areas within easy reach of London. The suburbs continued to expand in the late 1870s and 1880s. Yet this increase was still not significant enough to be considered a problem to those who already lived there, those whom Walter Besant in his guide to South London called '...the aristocracy, the first families of the suburbs'.2 Nor had the suburbs'

potential as a planned solution to overcrowding in London itself been fully recognised.3 Almost unnoticed, throughout the 1880s the buildings had steadily proliferated, largely in response to the need of the less well off artisan classes to move out of the congested city centre. Even so, at the beginning of the 1880s, the suburbs were still seen as the undisputed territory of the middle classes. The word 'villa' still denoted a residence of charm and individuality, and the word 'suburban', grace and solitude.

By the 1890s, however, many of the inhabitants of the suburbs were on the defensive. Their fears centred most obviously around the loss of what they had always considered theirs - the space, beauty and remoteness of the rural suburbs. They also feared the encroachment of an alien class and the threats that implied to their own way of life. These threats were perceived as coming from two specific directions. One was immediate and concrete - the growing numbers of artisan and clerical workers who were moving out of the inner city to the suburbs and whose potential as a market the speculative builders were working hard to exploit. Another, more insidious threat, was their sense of having lost the moral highground to members of their own class who were campaigning on behalf of the poor and the homeless in the inner city and who had exerted considerable pressure to find political answers to the growing crisis. In response, a housing policy of municipal housing and related public transport services that directly affected the suburbs was gradually evolving.4 Just as one section of public

opinion had been activated about conditions in the inner city in the 1880s, in the 1890s another section woke up to the extent and nature of the developments that were taking place in the suburbs.

The distinctions made between the suburbs and the inner city based on the polarisation of affluence and poverty, working class and middle class, overcrowding and space were often assumed according to geographical and sociological lines drawn before the 1880s. What happened in the crucial years that followed made such distinctions demonstrably untrue. As Booth discovered when his survey broadened in the 1890s to include the suburbs, patterns of mobility, employment and class structure continued to shape the suburbs in a disturbingly similar way to those he had analysed in the inner city. H.J. Dyos confirms this picture in his analysis of the growth of Camberwell, where he shows how piecemeal building led to suburban slums, and how 'geographical insularity' made divisions of classes even more specific than in the inner city.5

Patterns of immigration rapidly invested particular suburbs with a class identity. Surbiton, Ealing and Sidcup, for instance, were middle class suburbs. The lower middle classes, made up of supervisors, middle managers and better paid clerks moved out to suburbs such as Palmers Green, Wood End and New Southgate. The Railway suburbs, such as Tottenham and Edmonton, were identified with artisans and clerks dependent on subsidised transport links to reach their workplace. Alan Jackson's picture of the London

suburbs in 1900 further reveals the clear class divisions within areas based on the nearness of housing to the station.6 However, there was still a fundamental difference between the suburbs and the inner city which lay in their different stages of development. The suburbs in the 1890s still offered a potential for social planning considerably greater than the city. It is this single fact which explains the crucial importance of responses to suburban development for evaluating the power of the newly emergent social attitudes and the tenacity of the old.

What I want to establish first is the perceived nature of the suburban world of the pre-1880s. This will be used as a measure by which to assess the extent of any political and social shifts in the concept of the 'suburb' during the 1890s. To do this I shall draw primarily on material concerned with housing. Just as descriptions of housing in the inner city provided a crucial means of understanding urban dynamics, so too the literature of suburban housing provides a most effective means of understanding the suburbs.

Those writers about the suburbs whom I will discuss fall into four broad categories. The first two comprise those whose support for the traditional suburban way of life was unquestioning. These were the survey and tourist writers who catalogued the history and delights of the suburbs for readers of general interest. They concentrated on the positive aspects of suburban landscape and life, deploring signs of change. Not surprisingly, the mood is often

nostalgic. Their bland, collective tone is counterbalanced by the second category which is a series of individual voices. These individuals entered the public arena to express their personal response to specific issues, and their resistance to change was firmly rooted in self-interest. The bedrock of assumptions about suburban life which existed at the beginning of and during the 1880s is revealed in these writings.

The other two categories cover a far wider range of opinions. The third includes the social commentators who reveal a growing awareness of the peculiar role of the suburbs in determining the future direction of society. They represent a variety of political standpoints, and investigate a variety of immediate concerns. However, they share a broader consciousness of the suburbs' close relationship with the inner city and a conviction - though for different reasons - of their political, moral and social importance. The last category comprises those novelists who chose the suburbs as the location and often as the theme of their novels.

Section 2

At the opening of the 1880s, the suburban middle classes had a burgeoning sense of themselves and their right by descent, by intelligence or by financial success, to influence public affairs. They:

> ...were understood to be the soundest, the purest, the strongest, the wisest in all the land; and as such they received homage from press and platform continually. For every civic virtue, for every domestic excellence, they were celebrated in strains of fervid panegyric...7

The arena for the activities that won them such adulation was the city. Their rewards were embodied in their elegant and remote suburban homes.

I shall make W. Spencer Clarke's The Suburban Homes of London my starting point in understanding the nature of this domestic world - a world made possible by the economic life of the City, but firmly insulated from it by distance and emphasis. It is a pictorial guide to the various residential areas of suburban London and representative of a body of similar books.8 It was published in 1881, two years before The Bitter Cry of Outcast London helped to initiate the fierce debates about the relationship of housing to moral standards and the role of environment and heredity in the development of the personality. It is important that Clarke's book is seen to predate this moment, because his confidence in the world he described allowed him an honesty of appraisal that conveys to readers a clear picture of suburban values and ideals at this time. Its tone is unequivocal pride and pleasure in the beauty of London's suburbs, and the spirit is one which invites an unquestioning, appreciative response. The basis from which he wrote was one of certainty, and the world he observed was a world of choice, far removed from the imperatives of the inner city. He wrote about a middle class world for middle

class people who had not yet been made either guilty or afraid by the most recent exposures of working class conditions and their implications for the suburban environment.

Because of this, Clarke was able to record information that underlay the impending class battle without realising its significance. As he systematically describes each suburb, he almost invariably introduces his description by an allusion to its railway station or its relationship with the various lines and termini. The romance of the railway and its significance for England as a world power is dominant, and not its implications for a suburban landscape:

> The access to Putney from anywhere is easy because of the contiguity to Clapham Junction, whence are lines that go to the end of the earth... (SHL 413)

In the same spirit he records the growth of the populations of individual suburbs, heaping up figures for descriptive emphasis and pointing out the extent to which new building was beginning to change the face of the landscape. None of this evidence struck him as potentially ominous. On the contrary, he perceives growth as evidence of human endeavour and achievement, of man's desire for peace and beauty. Continuing a long tradition that held domestic architecture to be an expression of the community's moral life, he interprets the increase in family houses as something intrinsically beneficent and coherent.9 He portrays the suburbs as the resting place of the successful man, and its houses as embodying the morality of home. These were the places, the areas that protected his rear when the

'monarch goes money-hunting'. (SHL 494) Similarly, the industrial development at Stratford was a 'marvel of growth in every way'. (SHL 50)

The confidence Clarke had that man would enhance his environment was complete. He perceived man in action as a moral force, and in the suburbs Clarke found a fusion of the concrete achievements of the mid-Victorian age such as railways and the increase of property, with the accepted traditional values of family and countryside. Even the growing evidence of working class housing in particular suburbs such as Edmonton, Tottenham and Camden Town, and its relationship with the housing difficulties of the inner city, were noted without concern. They, too, revealed 'The energy of the English character', and made manifest man's concern for man. (SHL 49)

Clarke's belief in progress, his conviction that what was happening was good for all, grew from confidence in the rightness of existing social structures. The beauty and the elegance of the suburbs represented the private side of that world, and developments seemed to affirm its future and symbolise the increasing power of the ascendant middle class. The fact that Clarke criticised unsightly buildings, lamented the loss of attractive woodland and pasture, and commented, although briefly, on the overspill of the working classes, indicates that his perception of the suburban world was not a deliberately blinkered one. It was not that he ignored what he did not want to see, but that the evidence

did not suggest that the world of the suburbs as he knew it could ever be fundamentally changed.

Section 3

An insight into the mood of the middle classes just a few years later in 1885 is offered by Frederick Greenwood's article, 'What has become of the Middle Classes?' published in Blackwood's Magazine. He recorded just how deeply shaken the middle classes had been by the accusations alleged against their values and social system by the revelations about the poverty and housing conditions of the working classes. One of the most unnerving factors had been what was perceived as a kind of class treachery, in that those early attacks had been levelled, either directly or indirectly, by members of their own class who had, in various ways, identified with working class interests.10 As we have seen, public guilt had been espoused by many and purged with acts of philanthropy, social journalism, and 'slumming', as well as systematic attempts to understand the issues involved and to solve them. Greenwood's article reads like a rallying call to a retreating army, reminding the middle classes of their former triumphs, and summoning up their determination to reassert their moral superiority.

Greenwood pointed out that an intimation of their diminished confidence was confirmed by the growing silence of the middle classes in the face of the growing

vociferousness of the working classes. This opinion offers an interesting parallel to Booth's and Margaret Harkness' profoundly different perception of the situation, and demonstrates clearly the link between the working classes' search for a public voice and the middle classes' increasing unease with their own. We need to be reminded, as we are by Raymond Williams in The Country and The City, that the impact of the images of inner city horror can obscure an appreciation of how far-reaching the changes in social and labour organisation during this period already were.11 The response from the middle classes, described as paralysed and submissive before the threat of 'the primordial forces of society', may appear extreme but, in terms of class interests, was well-founded. One of the ways Greenwood attempted to reassert the class lines was by rejecting the new names given to the classes in the public debate - names suggested by a Socialist ideology - and to reinstate the old terminology which described the traditional social hierarchy:

> Of classes we hear much, no doubt, but of the great middle classes, as they used to be called, nothing.... those classes are effaced, and only two remain for the politician to deal with - landlords, and the most indigent and ignorant poor.12

Although Greenwood objected to class definitions drawn from the relationship of people to property, he nevertheless acknowledged that desire for property was at the heart of the conflict. Economic success as a criterion for personal worth would, he felt, rationalise the problem by ensuring that what a man owned was a measure of his value. He decried

the government's ambiguous philosophy which appeared to haver between humanitarian concerns and profit motives and which had helped to engender and foster guilt among the middle classes about ownership, indirectly teaching the working classes the lesson that 'it is lawful, and even a duty, to knock property on the head and take its goods'.13

The perceived erosion of the value of the middle classes as expressed in terms of property, which now defined them as exploiters rather than as achievers, is clearly relevant to the suburbs where the private worlds of the middle classes were established. On one level, the fight for the suburbs appears to be a defensive action against territorial encroachment. However, it was essentially a many layered class struggle. Nuances of class definition increased as members of the established middle classes tried to preserve their way of life against the aspirations of the immigrants who, in their turn, struggled to adopt middle class models. The aesthetics of domestic suburban architecture, normally the concern of the architect, were drawn into the language of this class struggle.

One strategy was to construct an untouchable utopian world. This mode of defence is clearly seen in contemporary surveys of the suburbs, of which Percy Fitzgerald's London City Suburbs as They are Today is an example.14 Like W. Spencer Clarke's book it is a guide, but, published twelve years later, it is divided from it by an altered public consciousness. Fitzgerald described what was now recognised as a threatened world and his response was both retreat and

apparent attack. He attempted to preserve the world that Clarke observed but he could not write about it in the same way. The mingling of the old and the new and the evidence of change were no longer sources of admiration, for he had some idea of their implications. Instead he retreated into the nostalgic language of the pastoral and of myth.

Fitzgerald divides his suburban world into two. The first is the romantic, beautiful, exclusive areas of the upper middle classes. The pastoral is an important factor here. No longer is the suburbs's relationship to the centre of London emphasised. The aim is rather to sever the link which led to a confusing and challenging world. The whole page illustrations present an idyllic rural world. Detached from the text, the viewer would be as likely to opt for Somerset or Devon as the most likely locations for a series of watercolours depicting stiles, milkmaids, cobbled streets, gentle heath land and village greens. Distance from London is crucial. The suburbs favoured by Fitzgerald are in retreat. They are 'sylvan retreats', set amongst 'umbrageous trees' in the view of 'distant verdant hills'. (LCS 133;264;166) The affected classical terminology self consciously fostered an illusion of a timeless, unchanging world.

The second world Fitzgerald comments on is that of the new suburban housing developments intended for the artisan classes, or the lower middle class City clerk. Here his strategy is contemptuous dismissiveness in terms weighted with class judgements. Here Spencer Clarke's straightforward

aesthetic judgement of 'ugliness' becomes 'bad taste'. The responsibility is effectively shifted from the architect to the resident working classes who by implication could not appreciate beauty and so foisted their vulgarity on to the unfortunate middle class. Working class 'pretenders' are made a subject for mockery, as is the monotony of the world he implicitly accuses them of having created. 'Bad taste', 'ugliness, 'cheap' and 'monotony' become pejorative terms attached to the working classes through descriptions of the houses they lived in.

A demarcation between two types of 'suburbs' inevitably blurred that word's meaning. Fitzgerald clearly feels that he could not use the same word to describe the outlying beauties of Harrow, Richmond and Dulwich as well as the new estates at Wood Green, Walthamstow and beleaguered Clapham. In his text the old suburbs become 'favoured places', while 'suburban' gradually emerges as a generic term for the manifestations of working class encroachment - for the 'usual squalid streets', '"second-hand" houses', and '"thick-ribb'd" houses'. (LCS 78;157;129) It also becomes a term for the kind of person who lived in such properties. '"A Claphamite order of mind"', for instance, is clearly a sneer directed at those who became attached to the place where they lived, but whose taste and class made such feelings ridiculous. (LCS 161) References to the aspiring suburban dwellers are frequently marked out with quotation marks - a device that cumulatively undermines the validity of their existence.

Fitzgerald was not concerned with what forces had set up an identification of the working classes with ugliness and congestion, and the middle classes with spaciousness and beauty. He either did not appreciate or preferred to ignore that most of the new developments were the direct responsibility of the class he sought to protect. H.J. Dyos identifies five groups who made financial gain from suburban developments.15 Two of these were the current residents of the suburbs - the landowner and the plot owner who were both prepared to sell their land for building. Acting on time-honoured principles of profit and initiative, they were riding on the band wagon of the housing shortage and helping to fill the suburbs with quick selling cheap houses.

The physical distance which was desired between the suburbs and the inner city also implied a moral distance between the drive for financial gain and the possible social consequences of intensive building programmes. By placing the debate firmly in aesthetic territory, it was possible to confirm middle class superiority and to base objections about housing developments on the importance of preserving beauty and pleasant amenities while evading an acknowledgement of their own responsibility for the nature of suburban developments and of the working classes' pressing needs. It was the working classes which were bound to spoil anything they were associated with, as, for instance, the public parks which were spoiled by the peoples' desire for the uniformity of something 'as trim, tame and monotonous as possible'. (LCS 222)

That defensiveness was the mark of the suburban middle classes during this period was acknowledged by a leader in The Times, 1892, which drew to a conclusion correspondence concerning the fate of the suburb St John's Wood, should a Private Member's Bill sanction the extension of the Sheffield, Manchester and Lincolnshire Railway through it.16 This particular correspondence reveals that the fight was perceived as becoming the responsibility of one particular section of the middle classes. Not only were some members of the middle classes ideological traitors (those tabulated by Greenwood in his article discussed earlier); not only was the government allowing itself to be influenced by radical elements, but the upper reaches of the middle classes were now also seen to be deserters. Once business, in the form of property developers moved into their domestic territory, they capitalised on property prices, sold their land and moved to pleasanter places outside the suburbs. 'Land' did not necessarily mean large estates. Even large gardens could be sold for the building of a cluster of small houses. This inevitably contributed to what was seen as the doom of an area, and left the less financially well off to cope with the results as well as they could. The residents who:

> ... hold on are taken in flank and rear by ghastly terraces of tawdry villas; a panic seizes all...17

'State robbery', that is, land development on behalf of the working classes at the expense of the middle classes, compounded this panic. Single voices, made representative of their class interests through selection for publication in

The Times, affirmed that a known world was being overthrown.

What was emerging then was a last ditch defence by the members of the middle class who were unable to exploit the housing boom, against a lower middle class and a rising artisan class. That this was a prevalent middle-class fear is confirmed by a parody appearing in Punch a month later: 7

> Or if it housed the WORKING MAN
> Would Lords or Commons dare eject him?
> Picture the clamour if you can!
> His vote, his demagogues, protect him.
>
> But you, who only use your brains -
> The peoples' voice, the noble's money,
> Not yours - why save you from the trains?
> For quiet so you say? How funny! 18

Many members of the middle classes perceived themselves as effectively trapped between working class power and the wealth of the landed and upper middle classes; just as, topographically, they were trapped by approaching houses and railways which served the masses and filled the pockets of the property speculator.

Section 4

In territorial terms the battle had been lost by the mid 1880s, but the attempt to reclaim a class territory and draw more clearly the line between those who considered themselves indisputably middle class and the aspiring working classes continued. Another strategy for preserving middle class values was a sophisticated version of Fitzgerald's attacks on working class 'taste'. Punch

identified with this class defensiveness and launched an energetic campaign against the new suburbanites. Its extensive coverage reflected that this issue of class conflict was one of the obsessions of the day, while its assured and lighthearted satire gave a reassuring distance. Suburbs and aspiring suburban dwellers filled the pages of Punch during the years 1889 to 1892. Features, cartoons and parodies abounded in which they were belittled by a tone which assumed in the reader the comfortable amusement of the secure and well-informed man who could afford to laugh. Thereafter, about 1894, interest began to fade. But by then Punch had done much to integrate the conflict and, in doing so, to establish the identity of a new consciousness and a new class which could be allowed class pretensions while effectively being demarcated as a lower social categorisation.

Punch created out of the class conflict a new suburban man, a mutation of the working class and lower middle class. In the medley of material out of which the Punch suburbanite was constructed, there are three major strands by which the pretenders of the suburbs are literally and figuratively belittled in contentious areas of property and life-style. The first exposes the class pretensions of those who hung precariously on the edges of a culture whose models of comfort, security and power they desired. Dabchick is one of Punch's examples of the aspiring working class. His path to success is charted in a 'letter' to social ambition from the sorrowing moralising Diogenes Robinson in July 1891.

Dabchick is apparently driven by that demonic force which 'impelled grocers to ludicrous pitches of absurdity' and had 'driven the wife of a working man to distraction because her neighbour's front room possesses a more expensive carpet'. 19 More significantly, Dabchick's rise from Balham to South Kensington marks his spiritual change from happiness and serenity to being a 'profoundly miserable man'. His unexpected success in financial speculation makes him friendless and ridiculous to the class he imitated, yet contemptuous of the class he had left behind. '"Delenda est Balhamia"' is his 'motto' now. Dabchick is laughed at for his absurdity, judged for his moral decline. Praise for playing the economic market successfully - the keynote of the middle classes' power - is conspicuous by its absence. That kind of success was clearly not considered appropriate, and Dabchick is punished for the confusion of class identity it produces.

The second strand mocks suburban man's smallness. The reality of his small home and garden, not to mention his small income, becomes a metaphor for his small-mindedness, and his ineffective struggles against uniformity and exploitation. Since he could not plant oaks, new suburban man planted mustard and cress in a gesture to his domestic happiness. Classical imagery is inappropriate to describe his world, for he is happily contained in his own 'little' world. The final verses of 'Suburban Love-Song' illustrate this satiric method perfectly:

> Here comes no nymph where the blue waves lisp
> On the white sand's gleaming level,
> Where the sharp light strikes on the laurel

crisp,
And flowers in the cool shade revel.

But the garden shrubs are as fair to me
As pine and arbutus and myrtle
That grow by the shores of the Grecian sea,
Where deathless nightingales twirtle.

And the little house, with its suites complete,
And the manifold anti-macasser,
And the chalet cage, whence he greets the street -
Meae puellae passer -

Are fairer than aught that the sun is above
In the world as much as I've seen of it;
For the little house is the realm of love,
And my sweet little girl is the queen of it.20

The third strand emphasises that suburban man's place is in the world of domestic sentiment. In the world of love, 'peaceful domesticity' and 'simple happiness' suburban families can safely be allowed to revel. Some pity is extended to them for the situations in which they found themselves, but these finally added up to suburban man's inadequacy in controlling or contributing to the larger world. While the middle classes distanced themselves from the building developments, it was seen as fitting that new suburban man should be swallowed up in 'stucco-faced Sahara such as spreads, and spreads, and spreads',21, and was fair game for exploitation by unscrupulous builders:

'A fair return,' the Builder said,
'Two hundred, say, per cent.,
Is all the profit that I want
On anything I've spent.
Now, if you're ready, Tenants dear,
I'll take the quarter's rent.' 22

In May 1889, Punch introduced a new bi-monthly feature

entitled 'The Diary of a Nobody' written by George and Weedon Grossmith.23 The diary is that of a City clerk. Mr Pooter, the self-styled hero, seeks respect through social acceptance. His diary, private and unread except by him, is the only means he has of validating the identity he had chosen for himself; that is, responsible, hard-working, influential and sophisticated. Pooter is a victim of transitional class definitions. He inhabits the uncomfortable no-man's land between the respectable working class and the lower middle class. One of the ways by which Pooter's striving for middle-class status is ridiculed is through his attitude to his house. 'The Laurels' is haunted by the weaknesses that haunt Pooter's life philosophy. There is a garden, but so close to the railway line that indirectly created it, that the wall is cracked. Its name hankers after the remote garden estates of the monied classes yet its road, Brickfield Terrace, places it as one of the 'thousands of grey streets' noted by Percy Fitzgerald and many others. Its railway places it as one of the least desirable sections of a new development dependent on quick and easy access to the City. Pooter is identified as a user of the Great Northern Railway that increased its schedules so rapidly that by 1898 it:

> ...carried 28 million in the suburban service...[in] the pressure that took place between 8 and 10 o'clock in the morning, and 5 and 8 o'clock in the evening.24

Pooter's 'simple domesticity' is ridiculed as thoroughly as his pretensions, despite its obeisance to the tradition that:

> The Englishman sees the whole of life embodied in his house. Here...he finds his happiness and his real spiritual comfort.25

'The Laurels' is Mr. Pooter's palace and he frequently extols the virtues of domestic life. Forced by economic necessity to be respectable, hard-working and conformist at the office, at home Pooter reclaims the right to the individualism that his private world allows him. This emerges in his passion for do-it-youself. Throughout the articles, he is involved in home improvements in an attempt to align himself with known identities. He enamels the bath red (contemporary fashion) and mounts a plaster of Paris stag's head in the hall (landed gentry).

Pooter's conflicts with tradesmen reveal that they recognise he is one of them in disguise. They trample in his hall, thrust cabbages in his hands, and protest abusively when he complains of the quality of their goods. His only strategy for retaining his own sense of distance is through a class based judgement, meaningful only to himself, that they 'are getting above themselves'. As the middle classes and Pooter have discovered, the means of retaining class status is to gain a psychological distance by creating a sub-class. On the other hand, those whose respect he covets appear only shadowily on the periphery of his life. Pooter's social equals, that is, those who accept him, are substitutes for the companions he desires. Gowing and Cumming, undifferentiated and unspecified as their names suggest, exist in an uneasy truce with him. They are held together only by a social vacuum. His gods are Mr Perkupp,

his boss, and the Mayor, the leader of local society. His devils are fear of the exposure of his middle-class masquerade by bow ties that fall off, a front door that sticks when the curate calls and the same blancmange served up on three successive days.

Pooter is not portrayed as totally devoid of positive characteristics. Yet the 'virtues' for which he is praised, and through which the stereotype becomes personalised are actually a means of control over those such as he who aspire to the middle classes. The virtue through which he becomes most sympathetic to the reader is his love for his wife, Carrie. Despite their occasional tiffs he is lonely without her, appreciative of her good nature and always glad to please her. She, in her turn, is his greatest support. '"You, dear old Charlie, are <u>not</u> handsome, but you are <u>good</u>..."' she declares, and we have no doubt that a compliment is intended. At the same time Pooter's identity is defined by the insularity of marriage rather than the potential collectivism of a working class consciousness formed by the conditions of the inner city.

Similarly, Pooter's industry is presented as a positive virtue, even though his working relationships re-enact the ambivalent class position of his private life. He reveres Mr Perkupp without question; the clerks under him he attempts to impress without much success. However, Pooter's perseverance is rewarded. It is Mr Perkupp who, in his role of administering rewards and punishments like a god, sanctions Pooter's entrance to the middle classes by giving

him the freehold on his house for his hard work. The integrative lesson here is clear.

The portrayal of Pooter is considerably more sophisticated than the simple suggestion that surburban man has his good side for all his social errors. Two models are offered: one, the social climber who is ridiculous in his pretensions and only deserving of rejection; two, the hard working man whose job, family and home form the limits of his consciousness and his value. This last is unequivocally approved. When Pooter is finally given his house it is made clear that it is not a reward for his business acumen. The deeds are only handed over when Pooter has passionately declared his acceptance of his lot: 'I love my house and I love the neighbourhood, and could not bear to leave it'. As J.M. Richards notes in his analysis of suburban psychology:

> It is in keeping with his ambition to take root, to reduce his responsibilities to a kind his mind and eye can encompass, to contrive for himself an environment ...in which he is master...26

The characterisation of Mr Pooter served another integrative purpose. It deliberately marked a contrast to those barbaric hordes whose life style was supposedly threatening the suburbs. Mr Pooter is, in fact, a fictional representation of what the middle classes <u>wanted</u> suburban man to be. '...it's the diary that makes the man', writes Pooter, and he is right. With considerable skill, the Grossmiths created a silly, inoffensive, harmless and well meaning representative of the anonymous masses to amuse and placate the middle classes. The reassuring message was that

the most private and cherished thoughts of the new suburban man were not dreams of a class struggle but dreams of acceptance into the middle classes - his only desire, not revolution but endless imitation.

This version of the suburban man affirmed and consolidated the class he sought to emulate. His geographical distance from the heart of London appeared to spell moral and political distance from its problems. Removed from the conditions that were creating a catalyst for change, inner city 'barbarians' were able to be drawn into a traditional framework of values built on hard work, respectabililty and domestic harmony. They were induced to pretend capitalist investment in tiny houses dressed up in 'stucco' where they then perpetuated the values of marriage and family in their 'mournful and monotonous, though moral existence', and had 'crazes' instead of ideas. Territorial rights had had to be acceded, as they finally were to Pooter, but moral and class rights were reasserted over them, reordering the confusion that had been so terrifyingly created by the problems of the inner city.

Section 6

The changing face of the suburbs, noted by Clarke, was created by speculative builders, and it is in the responses to their strategies that the most coherent overview of the conflict I have been discussing can be identified. The

growth and design of the London suburbs was almost totally due to their activities, and since this is so the speculative builder can be seen as one of the historians of his age. Writing in the Ruskinian tradition, Ernest Newton commented in 1891:

> In every age and in every country the spirit of the time is shown in the homes of the people, and I am afraid that when future generations read our history from our houses, they will not see in them anything to increase their admiration for the spirit of the nineteenth century.27

The 'spirit of the time', he made clear, was not only the ostentation of the higher levels of society, but the stereotyped uniformity of the suburbs which 'have enclosed London like a forest...'.

The speculative builder was the product and agent of capitalism. While questions of housing in the inner city were being thrashed out on moral grounds, the long established ideology of profit was continuing to shape the suburbs as it had already shaped the inner city. He was '...largely a creature of the grasping landowner...' who could exploit him for the highest possible price.28 In his turn, the builder exploited the working man who had saved enough money to buy a house of his own, and was led to believe that he was making a bargain by purchasing the dwelling from such a builder for a few pounds less. The lower middle classes were also potential victims:

> There is no class in the community which more largely inhabits jerry-built houses than what may be called the class of clerks;...for them the jerry-built villa has to a great extent been constructed, because the clerk cannot afford a more substantial structure.29

The effect that an influx of struggling, aspiring new home owners in the Pooter mould would have on what it meant to be 'middle-class' has already been considered. It was the speculative builder who offered them the opportunity to move into the suburbs and ensured their commitment to regular employment and hard work. The tragic aspect of such middle class pretensions is described in 'The Transformation of John Loxley', a short story by W.J. Dawson (1895), in which he tells how the newly married wife dies in a jerry house built on marshland with inadequate drainage, leaving her young husband to continue to pay the crippling mortgage.30

The speculative builder was constantly under attack during the 1890s from social commentators, architects and philanthropists for his ill-planned developments, inadequately structured houses and unashamed disregard of aesthetic criteria. It was he who created the image of long, dreary, brick-filled streets which echoes throughout most descriptions of the suburbs with an insistence only equalled by the image of the grey, monotonous streets of the East End abyss. The irony cannot be missed. But the speculative builder was well aware of what he was really selling. The exigencies of cheap housing created ugliness and desolation, but in suburban areas, buying the house was buying a key to middle class identity.

An anecdote, told in a lecture on 'London House Planning' in 1894, assumed a shared knowledge of the builder's part in the class game:

> A speculative builder, whose name I daresay many of you would know if I mentioned it, who had made his pile on rather small class

> houses, was once asked how he had been so successful, and his reply was: 'Well, yer see, I always put a Corinthian cornice in the front porterco.'31

The game was pervasive; the rules consistent. The building structure was made as cheap as possible. Its shoddiness was then disguised with symbols taken from a classical architectural language. A building would be described with a vocabulary appropriated from middle class expectations of a world of spaciousness, solitude and elegance. The fact that the strategy and its class implications continue to be applicable today should not obscure its effectiveness in the 1890s:

> The jerry-builder has absolutely invented a new language to describe his operations in these parts.

declared the editorial leader of The Builder in 1897, in an attack on the aesthetics of the London suburbs.32 In one sense it was not a 'new' language since the signifier remained the same, but what was signified had changed. This created a strangely absurd verbal territory for suburban immigrants to inhabit, where the concept held more weight than the reality. That is, commitment to joining a class hierarchy was more important to the buyer than evidence that he was a victim of it. The editor of The Builder continued:

> It is quite evident that we must reform our language, and we suggest the following corrections to our future dictionary compilers:-
> "Park" - A district covered closely with houses but without either grass or trees.
> "Grove" - A street of shops with plenty of flaring gaslights.
> "Garden" - A collection of houses without a patch of ground attached to them.
> "Avenue" - Two rows of houses opposite each

other with lamp-posts planted at intervals.

This comment is, of course, meant to be humorous, but the seriousness of its implications must not be dismissed. It is reminiscent of Booth's concern about 'gardens' and 'rents', voiced earlier in Chapter 1. It is also a reminder that the suburbs were being subjected to the same processes of development that had ultimately rendered areas of the inner city virtually uninhabitable. Most important of all was the reassertion of the worth of middle class values in the language of property, while the actual benefits and power they denoted were withheld.

Those wishing to leave the congestion and poverty of the inner city behind them were tempted to buy in particular areas by the illusion that they would be entering a middle class world of space and choice. On paper these people had no choice. Housing was desperately needed, and cheap housing was being provided by the jerry-builder who, in the face of governmental inadequacy, became '...the necessity of the age...'. However, the evidence points to the victims' acquiescence in the process, whether willing or otherwise. The general cry was that Londoners, '...habitually substitute pretentiousness for dignity, and vanity for happiness'.33

Although this was the physical reality of the London suburbs in the mid 1880s and 1890s, many commentators and planners still looked to the suburbs to fulfil a social ideal. Their potential for solving inner city problems had been recognised early in the 1880s. By the early 1890s it

was commonly accepted that the suburbs could provide the solution, not only to the physical congestion of the inner city, but to the moral and physical degeneration it produced. This ideal was made up of various elements, but it was the emphasis on the importance of the individual house as a family unit that was common to all groups and became the most persistent and influential.

Popular ideas of the polarisation of inner city and suburbs now took on another dimension. They did not only represent opposites in beauty and ugliness, health and deprivation, space and overcrowding. It became quite clear that while the conditions of the inner city were directly inimical to the maintenance of stable family life, the suburbs were a possible utopia of domestic strength and harmony. The evolution of these ideas owed equal debt to radical, philanthropic, Christian and Socialist thinking. Yet the outcome - to rehouse the urban masses in small individual houses, safe from the problems of the inner city, and protected by inward turning family interests - simply reinforced earlier traditions.

The tradition that surfaced most powerfully was the Christian perspective. Conceived in a Christian spirit, housing was considered to be able to elevate the moral life of its inhabitants. Andrew Mearns had claimed as much in 1882, yet it was not until 1889 that the idea had become sufficiently familiar for Lord Shaftesbury to be able to claim:

> ...that he spoke the truth, and a truth which could be confirmed by the testimony of all experienced persons, clergy, medical men, and

> all who are conversant with the working class, that until their domiciliary conditions were Christianised ... all hope of moral or social improvement was utterly vain.34

The concept of the 'Christianisation' of domestic dwellings went far beyond the practical considerations of sufficient physical space to ensure reasonable conditions for the growth of self respect, as required by Andrew Mearns. In fact, it fostered and consolidated the sanctity of family life by accepting the model of family unit homes. This had formerly been the domestic model for the better off, but it was now felt an urgent need to extend that privilege, and by implication, family stability, to all classes of people.

Such an idea reinforced the popular assumptions noted in Clarke's survey and appealed to many of those who wanted to avert social turmoil whatever their personal understanding of its causes might be. Family life was seen, not simply as an expression of Christianity, but as a religion in its own right. At a time when traditions and practice were being questioned, the home offered a kind of secular religion where individual interest and Christian ethics could be identified:

> Nowadays, when all religions are assailed, and we believe in nothing very strongly, it is almost impossible to make our churches express anything more than a sort of galvanised enthusiasm ... Belief in the sacredness of home-life, however, is still left to us, and is itself a religion, pure and easy to believe.35

These were the words of the architect, Ernest Newton, in his plea for 'Home-like Houses' in 1891. He went on to say that:

> ...love of home....is perhaps the only sentiment which a reticent Englishman is not

> ashamed to confess to; indeed, it is his boast that the English language alone possesses the word 'home' in its fullest sense.

The movement of people from the inner city to the suburbs was one of the significant factors in allowing a parallel class mobility, and, therefore, changing expectations and aspirations. That this was largely, if rather dubiously, made possible through the private enterprise of the speculative builder I have already shown. The implementation of a controlled housing policy through political means required a fundamental change of attitude. Quite simply, if the potentially ideal living conditions of the suburbs were ever to be realised, shorter working hours, subsidised travel and/or higher wages and assured employment were necessary. The economic implications of such an approach were nothing short of revolutionary. The 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act which empowered the County Council to buy up slum areas for improvements, and to initiate municipal building projects was the first substantial move in this direction, and the first response to the problems of the 1880s. The fate of the suburbs, as we have seen, had already been decided by the forces of profit and individualism.

Section 7

Among those commentators who recognised the unique social phenomenon that the development of the suburbs had

created, opinions were mixed. For radical thinkers who had participated in the earlier debates on the inner city, there was a discrepancy between their vision for the suburbs and the reality they witnessed. Frederic Harrison, for instance, the prolific social commentator and exponent of Positivism, affirmed that the suburbs were a possible means to achieve an ideal:

> The hopelessly rotten and festering slums of the old, crowded areas will have to be... rebuilt, and the inhabitants replaced in airy and commodious dwellings, at least half of them in fresh and healthy suburbs.36

Nevertheless, he saw the reality of suburban developments as a disturbing symbol of contemporary man's ugliness, in the same way that the ghettos and rookeries of the inner city provided new perspectives on man's relationship with his world:

> The bricks pour down in irregular heaps, almost as if, in some cataclysm or tornado, it were raining bricks out of heaven on the earth below,

he wrote in The Meaning of History, conveying a response to the suburbs in a dramatic, eschatological image reminiscent of responses in the 1880s to the inner city.37 Ironically, he perceived the suburbs as evolving into a 'wilderness', the territory outside order, coherence and structure, much as the earlier commentators had perceived the slums.

H.G. Wells shared Harrison's sense of ambiguity. He argued that the suburbs as they existed were inimical to moral and physical health, not to mention natural beauty. This he put down to the haphazard development dictated by urban forces and capitalist activity. Yet Wells also offered

a suburban ideal which he envisaged as morally enhancing and, in microcosm, an Englishman's model of his nation's values. He looked forward to the time when, '...the London citizen of the year 2000 A.D. may have a choice of nearly all England ... as his suburb'.38 This optimism does not permeate later novels set in the suburbs where he attacks the reality of ugliness, chaos and suffocating conformity in Ann Veronica (1909) and The New Machiavelli (1911).

Such pessimism was not shared by Sidney Low whose recognition that the suburbs were producing a new 'suburban type' which identified with the middle classes, was argued from a positive imperialist perspective in his article, 'The Rise of the Suburbs' written in 1891 for The Contemporary Review. The vision that Wells and Harrison felt was being undermined before their eyes, was for Low being made a reality. He argued vigorously for the healthily formative nature of the suburbs, maintaining that the degenerative effects of the centripetal tendency of the 1880s had at last been reversed. He showed statistically that the population of inner London had dropped by the end of the decade and noted with unequivocal pleasure that:

> The life-blood is pouring into the long arms of brick and mortar and cheap stucco that are feeling their way out to the Surrey moors, and the Essex flats and the Hertfordshire copses.39

While accepting the now familiar idea that inner city conditions stunted physical and moral health, he rejected its corollary that 'the feeble anaemic urban population' has to be replenished from rural stock. Instead Low offered a

model of suburban man, who, free from the destructive forces of the inner city, now lived in an environment that fused the air, cleanliness and space of the countryside with the educational and social resources of the city. He claimed that the modern suburbanite, physically tuned by 'football, cricket and tennis' and mentally tuned by his link with London had a 'higher nervous organisation and better intelligence' than either urban or rural dweller.

Low envisaged this new breed of people as a national resource since such mental and physical vigour could swell the ranks of the army. Anticipating H.G. Wells, Low had a vision of all of England as a series of suburbs. He saw them as nurturing the essence of middle class life on which England's future was founded. Low indicated the apotheosis of suburban man from a figure of ridicule, epitomised by such characters as Dabchick and Pooter, to a figure of national importance. He was 'the evolution of the age', embodying the old values of patriotism and class identity with a fresh physical and moral fitness created by the new suburban life style.

Yet another perspective on the suburbs as the breeding ground for a new consciousness came from Richard Jefferies in his series of articles for The Standard on 'Nature Near London', written between 1888 and 1889.40 Jefferies was approaching his subject from a very different point of view, and his comments generally referred to the new successful business class who had moved out to the more desirable suburbs. Nevertheless, he throws interesting light on what

he saw as a new suburban psychology. He used natural description as a starting point for the analysis of modern urban man. He was contemptuous of the suburb dweller, primarily because he saw the the move to the suburbs as a quest for class status disguised as a love of beauty of the countryside. He criticised '... semi-country seats, as the modern houses surrounded with their own grounds assume to be...'(NNL 199), and attempts of suburban gardens to '...mimic the isolation and retirement of ancient country houses...' (NNL 197).

The falsity of suburban man's relationship with the natural world went beyond mere status seeking. Jefferies saw it as a surface expression of a deep psychological restlessness. To attempt to divide life, working in the city and seeking rural peace in the suburbs, was seen as impossible. Each world had a coherence of its own but the power of each of them was unequal. Echoing an experience described in George Gissing's The Nether World (1889), and even more powerfully at the end of Mark Rutherford's Autobiography and Deliverance (1882), he observed that once the 'unseen influence of mighty London' had been experienced it would always colour the suburban dweller's perception of his world. What this conflict produced was another form of self-deceit. The suburban dweller did not want to belong to the city because he did not want to be involved in the conflicts and tensions it raised, nor the congestion and health hazards it imposed. He wished to identify with rural values since that appeared to offer a higher quality of life

and greater stability. In fact, what he escaped to was simply an out-of-work expression of working hours' achievement. The fundamental difference of time scales and space dimensions effectively blinded him to the nature of another way of life;

> And if the merchant spares an abstracted glance from the morning or evening newspaper out upon the fields from the carriage window, the furrows of the field can have but little meaning....The work in the field is so slow; the passenger by rail sees, as it seems to him, nothing going on...Thus it happens that, although cornfields and the meadows come so closely up to the offices and warehouses of mighty London, there is a line and mark in the minds of men between them... (NNL 102)

To Jefferies it seemed that the structure of the suburbs were creating a false consciousness. People were withdrawing from the dynamic universe of the city where living and working were bound together in search of an ill-defined, ill-founded ideal. This ideal can be seen as little more than conformity to a new version of depoliticised conservatism. Those who adopted the new social patterns did not understand the old aristocratic way of life or the essentials of natural processes, but pretended to both while turning away from their responsibility to the city from which their economic and class power was derived.

Section 8

For those involved in the political and sociological debates stirred up by the conditions of London slums, it was

with a feeling of despair that the century turned. The promise of the suburbs had not been fulfilled. An air of tiredness is detectable in Charles Booth's final volume of Life and Labour in London. The seventeen volumes straddle the research of two decades and their very proliferation from the revolutionary potential of the first two volumes published in 1889 to the resignation of the last volume, seems a paradigm of London's sprawling growth and the diffusion of moral and political energy it came to symbolise. Like many others, Booth saw the suburbs as the potential solution to the troubles of the inner city. He had put his faith in the individual to bring this ideal to life; the individual whose sense of responsibility to his family and community would form the collective morality of the future. Not surprisingly, he identified the body of such individuals as 'A new middle class... which will, perhaps, hold the future in its grasp'. Booth continued:

> Its advent seems to me the great social fact of today. Those who constitute this class are the especial product of the push of industry; within their circle religion and education find the greatest response; amongst them all popular movements take their rise, and from them draw their leaders.41

This was the class, the germ of which Booth had categorised as Class E in his first volume in the poverty series. Then it did not '... constitute a majority in the East of London, nor, probably, in the whole of London', though, prophetically as it turned out, he had then also believed that it held 'its future in its own hands'.42 This future was to be built in the suburbs by the aspiring middle

classes.

A leader in The Times of 1904, waking up belatedly to the fact that the the formation of the suburbs was a more important issue than a series of local battles, confirmed that a class struggle had taken place, and that the wealthy and landed classes had abandoned the suburbs, or isolated themselves in 'more favoured spots', leaving the suburbs to the business classes. These upper middle classes were now reversing the familiar pattern and taking pied-à-terres in the heart of London and cottages in the country. For those concerned for many years with such questions, there must have been a painful sense of déjà-vu to read:

> ...the aim must be to create not merely a suburb for the pleasure of the well-to-do, but a suburb where rich and poor alike may have agreeable surroundings: otherwise side by side with the smart faubourg will be a repetition of the old slum.43

The middle classes had proved to have a greater ability to adapt than they themselves appear to have been aware of. Threatened by 'barbarous masses', attacked by men and women of their own class and embattled by the invasion of their domestic territory, within twelve years they had redefined themselves, laying out the suburbs for their own profit, in class areas for their own comfort, while absorbing the social climber into their domestic and hierarchical morality. The 'new suburban man', born out of the drama of change in the inner city, had chosen to move out of the vortex to the peace of the suburbs where he set about cultivating a middle class life style. At the turn of the century, although Besant's 'aristocrats of the suburbs' had

vanished forever, the values of individualism, free enterprise and family still reigned supreme.

What emerges then is that the suburbs cannot be understood simply in terms of reaction. During the 1890s, they began to be recognised as:

> ...an environment fundamentally different from either [city or country], with distinctive attributes and needs.44

This difference grew from a series of political, social and economic dualisms set up by suburban living. Most obvious was the marked division between work and leisure and between work place and leisure space. The reward was better living conditions; arguably the loss was identity with community and labour. Significantly this allowed a psychological dualism to grow up. Home life could be constructed as a fiction designed to distance the city with its collective needs and economic imperatives, and to make the life of the individual supreme, as Charles Dickens had revealed in his portrait of Wemmick in Great Expectations (1861). This political no man's land enabled workers to side step the need for labour organisations that had evolved in the inner city, and to identify with the interests that 'made the predominantly Tory suburbs the growth-point of the cities'.45

The literature of the suburbs can be seen to be more diverse and less dramatic in content than the literature of the inner city. Much of it can appear parochial, limited and descriptive of social change rather than part of the process of that change: as such, a literature of reaction, rather

than radicalism. In the inner city the clash between traditional values and the conditions of the inner city put such a strain on the available language that writers and commentators had to find new ways to articulate their ideas. In the suburbs the clash we witness is largely one of resistance - a current way of life asserting itself against the possible new. Those who defended it wrote from what they assumed to be a set of common values for readers who would be predisposed to accept their arguments. In other words, the moral and political weighting of the language which the inner city commentators had had to struggle against worked to the advantage of suburb commentators in reinforcing the status quo. While this capacity of social power:

> ... to conceal itself, to appear natural, to coalesce completely and indivisibly with the values and accepted power symbols of a given society. (LP 3)

makes it harder for the critic to identify a starting point and to reconstruct the points of change in the nature of such power, the accumulation of material reveals marked shifts in the nature of class conflict and class boundaries.

It is possible to argue that the variety of subject matter and viewpoints can make the literature of the suburbs appear too diverse for coherence, particularly since few of the selected writers offer an overt social or political framework for their thoughts. Yet, in their potential perpetuation or redirection of inner city patterns the suburbs provide versions of a sequel to the story of the inner city of the 1880s. An investigation of a series of individual writings reveals them to be contributions to

larger arguments, one of which is the issue of class conflict and redefinition. In this way their coherence may be seen to be contained in the discourse the texts collectively create, both - horizontally - in relation to themselves, and - vertically - in relation to the literature of the inner city.

Notes

1. The spread of building is specifically alluded to in a popular song, 'The Spread of London' (1813), in London in Song, edited by W. Whitten (London, 1898). Contemporary commentary on the suburbs can be found in Chapter 3 of C.F.G. Masterman's, The Condition of England. General investigations of the potential of the suburbs can be found in Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities of Tomorrow (London, 1945), first published in 1898 as Tomorrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform, and Patrick Geddes', Cities in Evolution. See also D.A. Reeder, 'A Theatre of Suburbs: Some Patterns of Devlopment in West London, 1801 - 1911', in Studies in Urban History, edited by H.J. Dyos (London, 1968). The most valuable modern work done on the specific factors influencing the development of one London suburb is H.J. Dyos', Victorian Suburb: a Study of the Growth of Camberwell (Leicester, 1961).

2. Walter Besant, South London (London, 1899), p. 316.

3. Earlier experiments were small and localised. The model suburb of Bedford Park near Hammersmith is an example. It was designed by Norman Shaw on the neighbourhood principle with its own shops, parks etc.

4. Read A.S. Wohl's introduction to The Bitter Cry of Outcast London and J.R. Kellett, The Impact of Railways on Victorian Cities (London, 1969).

5. H.J. Dyos, Victorian Suburb, pp. 103-113.

6. Alan A. Jackson, Semi-Detached London: Suburban Development, Life and Transport 1900-39 (London, 1973), p. 21.

7. Frederick Greenwood, 'What has Become of the Middle Classes?', Blackwood's Magazine 138 (August 1885), p. 175.

8. W. Spencer Clarke, The Suburban Homes of London (London, 1881). Afterwards referred to in the text as SHL followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

9. See John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture (London, 1849). A new edition was published in 1880.

10. All the leading figures in the early philanthropic activities, and those who later became involved in the social analysis of poverty and employment came from wealthy, middle class backgrounds. Notable among them were Octavia Hill, Beatrice Webb, Charles Booth, Samuel and Henrietta Barnett.

11. Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (London, 1973), pp. 230-231.

12. Frederick Greenwood, 'What has Become of the Middle Classes?', p. 175.

13. Frederick Greenwood, 'What has Become of the Middle Classes?', p. 179.

14. Percy Fitzgerald, London City Suburbs as They are Today, illustrated by W. Luker Jnr (London, 1893). Afterwards referred to in the text as LCS followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

15. H.J. Dyos, Victorian Suburb, p. 87.

16 The Times, 25 April 1892, p. 9.

17. 'The Debasement of London Suburbs', The Times, 21 April 1892, p. 14.

18. 'St. John's Wood', Punch (28 May 1892), p. 262.

19. 'Letters to Abstractions. 1 - To Social Ambition', Punch (11 July 1891), p. 17.

20. 'Suburban Love-Song', Punch (18 May 1889), p. 241.

21. 'All-A- Blowing. A Spring Plea from the Suburbs', Punch (18 May 1889), p. 235.

22. 'The Builder and The Architect', Punch (27 August 1892), p. 96.

23. 'The Diary of a Nobody', Punch, May 1888 - March 1890.*

24. The Times, 'Suburban Railway Traffic', 21 January 1899, p. 10.

25. Hermann Muthesius, The English House (London, 1979), p. 7. First published in Berlin in 1904.

26. J.M. Richards, The Castles on the Ground, p. 60.

27. Ernest Newton, Architect, 45 (1891), p. 330.

28. Sydney Vacher, 'The Small Suburban House', Builder (4 February 1893), pp. 91-93 (p. 92).

29. Builder, (10 June 1893), p. 442.

30. W.J. Dawson, 'The Transformation of John Loxley' in London Idylls (London, 1895), pp. 145-178.

31. 'London House Planning', Builder (5 May 1894), pp. 343-346 (p. 344).

32. 'The "Uglification" of London', Builder (27 March 1897), pp. 287-289, (p. 288).

33. J.T. Emmett, 'Londoners at Home', Quarterly Review, 18 (July 1895), pp. 59-82 (p. 60).

34. Cited in W.G.S.S. Compton, 'The Homes of the People', New Review, 1 (June 1889), pp. 47-61 (p. 51)

35. Ernest Newton, 'Home-Like Houses', Builder (30 May 1891), pp. 60-61 (p. 60).

36. Frederic Harrison, 'Ideal London', Contemporary Review, 74 (July 1898), p. 150.

37. Frederic Harrison, The Meaning of History and Other Historical Pieces (London, 1894), p. 434.

38. H.G. Wells, Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought, (London, 1902), p. 46.

39. Sidney Low, 'The Rise of the Suburbs', Contemporary Review, 60, (October 1891), pp. 545 - 558 (p. 550).

40. Richard Jefferies, Nature Near London (London, 1889). Afterwards referred to in the text as NNL followed by the page number. The book is a collection of articles that originally appeared in The Standard during 1888. See List of Abbreviations.

41. Charles Booth, Life and Labour in London, Final Volume, p. 204.

42. Charles Booth, Life and Labour , Vol. 1, p. 51.

43. The Times, 'The Formation of the London Suburbs', 25 June 1904, p. 8.

44. Donald J. Olsen, The Growth of Victorian London (London, 1976), p. 204.

45. Bruce Coleman, 'The Idea of a Suburb: Suburbanization and Suburbanism in Victorian England', in London in Literature, edited by the English Syndicate (Roehampton, 1979), pp. 73-90 (p. 84).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SUBURBS: VERSIONS OF REPRESSION IN THE NOVELS OF ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, WILLIAM PETT RIDGE AND GEORGE GISSING, 1890 - 1899

Many of the novels which took the suburbs as their theme during the 1890s were part of the reaffirmation of the traditional values of home and family. They created serene and contained worlds which directly counterpointed a perception of the city as atomistic, unhealthy, ugly and corrupt. They also offered an alternative response to urbanisation from the realistic novels of the inner city, a response that exemplifies the integrative power of the fictional text.

Despite the apparent homogeneity of these domestic narratives, there is a surprising variety of tone within them; a possible indication of the force of the ambiguities that the novels' worlds suggest. These are set up by the way individual writers chose to deal with the nature of the relationship between life in the suburbs and life in the city. The inherent paradox that writers needed to confront was that the world whose values and way of life they eulogised was made possible and sanctioned by the world they

rejected.

Those writing about London during the 1890s could not totally jettison knowledge of the city. The interaction and interdependence of city and suburbs was too close and too familiar to divorce them completely and still offer an apparently authentic picture of suburban life. Yet none suggested that the values learned and lived in the suburb had the power to inform or transform urban values. The integrity of the suburban world had to be established within a closed moral arena. Here an oppositional distance could be constructed from what were perceived as evil influences specific to the inner city. For this sense of distance to be effective enough for individuals to feel released from social responsibility, it was important for the suburban world to be seen to grow from processes other than those which had been identified as creating poverty, unemployment and slums.

One resolution was to draw on traditions which predated the urban crisis of the early 1880s, and which had re-emerged in a specifically suburban context in contemporary documentation: that is, the sanctity of home and family life. In fictional terms this meant the construction of two separate spheres of experience; on the one hand, the private which is offered as an ahistorical perception of moral excellence and, on the other, the public which is offered as the purgatory of a particular historical moment through which the individual struggles towards timeless values.The polarising of home/work and private/public is expressed

through the hardening of gender division. Men, in their role as breadwinners, are portrayed as having an ambiguous moral position. They make possible a loving, uncontaminated home life for women and children to develop within, but only by risking moral contamination themselves in the city. Men carried the burden of the city's evils. Women on the other hand were released by men's sacrifice to construct a psychological distance within which they could develop their moral selves in the ideal described by Ruskin in Sesame and Lilies.

Implicit within this moral distance is a repression of economic realities. Movement out to the suburbs was invariably connected with improved conditions and taking on higher rents or mortgages. Suburban dwellers lived under the ecomomic imperative of travelling daily to the city to finance their suburban life. Yet repression of the economic facts that underpinned suburban structures is common to these novels. Family amd marital love, neighbourliness, and individualism are substituted as the dynamism and logic of this ideal world. In fictional terms it was a world where the personal significance of the suburbs as a complete, coherent and satisfying world could be substituted for the public significance of the city.

These novels then repress the realism they purport to recreate. They do not attempt to investigate and recreate an observed situation. They portray a perception of a desirable life style by anchoring it to recognisable work, domestic and material patterns that are largely accurate in

referential terms. But what is recognisable is not necessarily actual, as we have already seen in comparable slum novels such as Walter Besant's romances. In general, these texts present themselves as objects of desire, or thematise fantasies which validate a suburban way of life. Of the two novelists I want to discuss in detail, Arthur Conan Doyle's suburban novels provide the most extreme example of this type, and Beyond the City: the Idyl of a Suburb (1893) the best representative.1 While appearing to endorse suburban life as it is, it is more likely that he was creating a model for it. The second, William Pett Ridge, appears to be much closer to the realistic mode, but in fact, his fictional suburban world, though different, is as closed as Conan Doyle's. Pett Ridge deals with a variety of aspects of London life. In novels whose narratives are constructed from inner city perspective, the suburbs emerge as stultifying. In Outside the Radius (1899), Pett Ridge changes the narrative viewpoint and evaluates the suburban world according to its own system of values.2

George Gissing was to be the distinctive voice in the closing decade of the nineteenth century against this fictional model of suburban life. I have indicated earlier that his concerns were not contained in the urban poverty issues, and that he increasingly found the suburbs an effective means of exploring and expressing the stasis of culture and society that most concerned him. In a group of novels written in the 1890s, New Grub Street (1891), The Odd Women (1893), In the Year of Jubilee (1894) and The

Whirlpool (1896), he established a multi-perspective sequel to the psychological determinism he had explored through the language of the city in the slum novels. I shall consider Gissing's approach through the two earlier novels in which he pursues the logic set up by the novels of the 1880s and explores how urban processes have become internalised.3

Section 2

The world created by Arthur Conan Doyle in his novel Beyond the City: the Idyl of a Suburb, published in 1893, drew upon his personal history and deep wish for domestic happiness. It is the total antithesis of the London created in the short stories for which he is best known - the foggy, ill-lit, mysterious London of Sherlock Holmes, which has become a pervasive image of Victorian England.

Doyle wrote Beyond the City soon after moving with his wife and child to their first private married home. In his biography of Doyle, John Dickson Carr commented that:

> ...he rejoiced in his new house at number 12 Tennison Road, South Norwood. With its window-frames painted white against dark-red brick, its balcony over the front door, its walled garden, the house stood in semi-rural country...Next year, he decided, he would have a tennis-lawn. Always fascinated by new contraptions, he had bought a tandem tricycle...4

This Norwood of pretty houses, open countryside, of physical activity and healthy personal pleasures is the setting of the story of three families, the Denvers, the Westmacotts

and the Walkers. Doyle by his own confession set out to create a utopia, and he makes clear that the move from the city to the suburbs indicates a move towards domestic and moral perfection. These families are among those who have taken such a decision - the new suburbanites who wished to turn their backs on the implications and demands of city life.

Their decision is related specifically to the contemporary scene in a lengthy passage which seeks to substantiate the fantasy of the novel by locating it in a contemporary and recognisable reality. I quote an abbreviated extract here:

> Long before there had been a thought of a township there...old Mr. Williams had inhabited "The Brambles", as the little house was called, and had owned all the fields about it....Gradually, however, as the years passed, the City had thrown out a long brick-feeler here and there, curving, extending, and coalescing, until at last the little cottages had been gripped round by these red tentacles, and had been absorbed to make room for the modern villa ..../ For years they [his daughter]) had clung to the one field which faced their windows, and it was only after much argument and many heartburnings that they had at last consented that it should share the fate of the others. A broad road was driven through their quiet domain, the quarter was re-named "The Wilderness", and three square, staring, uncompromising villas began to sprout up on the other side.(BCS 162-3)

Here Doyle sums up the history of suburban growth in imagery that we have already encountered in works as various as Booth, Frederic Harrison and H.G. Wells. However, the narrative reveals that what may appear threatening because it is new is, in fact, a blessing. Solitude and isolation

become community and caring. The apparent manifestations of an unfeeling, monster-like city are, in fact, manifestations of the rejection of that city - the outward signs of a series of happy, loving family units, private within their own walls but at the same time bonded with their neighbours in the progressive communal gardens.

The naming of the group of houses as 'The Wilderness' is part of the same metaphorical reversal. At first it appears to be simply the builder's familiar attempt to convey a sense of rus in urbe, but Doyle turns this contemporary decorative conceit into an ironic metaphor which applauds the moral probity of the suburbs. The word 'wilderness' in 'Dwellers in the Wilderness', the title of Chapter 4, suggests a land of limbo, a place outside the structures and security of the city inhabited by a group of outcasts, and is reminiscent of the way the East Enders had been described in the 1880s. This naming of the poor as 'outcasts' had finally called into question, not their own moral state, but that of those who had rejected them. In the same way Doyle's metaphor, by polarising the life of Norwood with that of London, raised the question, 'Who really lives in the wilderness - those people whose lives are rooted in love and harmony, or those whose life is absorbed by the glamour of crowds and the struggle for money?' The evidence accumulatively put before the reader substantiates the viewpoint that to be 'Beyond the City' in 'The Wilderness' is to have chosen freedom from moral contamination in a life of moral order. It would be simplistic to see this attitude

as merely escapist. As I have shown, many contemporary commentators shared this vision of the suburbs' positive contribution to the quality of life.

However, in Doyle's novel, to equate the leaving behind of problems with the seeking of moral strength builds in an ambiguity to the fundamental assumptions behind the narrative. This ambiguity is increased by a narrowing of the perception of what actually is evil about the city. The evil that is London and with which it is dangerous to come in contact is not simply the city but the City. The City is represented as powerful and important - Harold's parents are delighted when he is offered a job as a stockbroker. Nevertheless, it is fraught with moral dangers. This is explored through the hero of the novel, Harold Denver, who is tempted by money, falls and is redeemed by the love of a good woman and the power of his domestic base in the suburbs. His pleasure in Clara's acceptance of his proposal of marriage lies in her power to counteract the evil influences under which he spends his day:

> 'I feel I am a saved man. You do not know how degrading this City life is, how debasing, and yet how absorbing. Money forever clinks in your ear. You can think of nothing else. From the bottom of my heart I hate it ...There was but one way in which I could defy the taint, and that was by having a home influence so pure and so high that it may brace me up against all that draws me down.' (BCS 213)

Here we can see that a sophisticated development of the 'false consciousness' noted by Richard Jefferies has taken place. The artifical separation of work life and home life in city and suburb has become overlaid with further

divisions. The first both creates a new class and cements the old. Working class women in the inner city contributed as a matter of course to the family income whenever they were able to, as Margaret Harkness had noted in her investigation into the working patterns of women in London, Toilers in London. A mark of rising to middle class status for a man was the ability to maintain his wife and children on his own. Separated from the problems of a working life and deliberately made ignorant of its stresses, newly middle class women were encouraged to take upon themselves the role of moral arbiter and domestic comforter. From this grew the second division - that of gender. Man no longer exposed himself to the danger of the hunt but to the moral dangers of the Stock Exchange. Morally vacuous himself, he nevertheless ensured a domestic refuge of moral strength.

The world of the novel rarely leaves the suburb. It is here that Harold is supported when, before his marriage, the evils of the City temporarily overwhelm him. It is here that Clara refuses to accept his offer to release her from their engagement.

> 'Do you think a woman's love is like this sunshade...a thing fitted only for the sunshine, and of no use when the winds blow and the clouds gather?' (BCS 264)

she asks. This support gives Harold the strength he needs to recoup the dual losses of money and morality through that other virtue of the suburbs - hard work. The concluding paragraph of the novel relates his struggle to the broader theme:

> ...with his sweet and refined home atmosphere he is able to realise his wish, and to keep

> himself free from the sordid aims and base ambitions which drag down the man whose business lies too exclusively in the money market of the vast Babylon. As he goes back every evening from the crowds of Throgmorton Street to the tree lined peaceful avenues of Norwood, so he has found it possible in spirit also to do one's duties amidst the babel of the City, and yet to live beyond it. (BCS 320)

The adoption of suburban life, then, is seen as a conscious decision to balance the demands of capitalism which shape the outer world with the demands of conscience that shape the inner world. In these terms, Doyle can present moving beyond the city as dynamic not escapist - a positive move to consolidate the ethics of Christianity and re-establish a morality based on them that had begun to be unbalanced in favour of sociological perceptions of justice.

It was important to Conan Doyle that these values were seen as essentially traditional. Suburban growth was only new in bricks and mortar. This newness was seen as positive in that it symbolised the possibility of man's moral renewal, but it was in no way desired as a catalyst for new ideas or new modes of thought as his treatment of the New explicitly shows.

The New is represented by Miss Westmacott, a middle-aged but energetic woman who also lived in 'The Wilderness'. She storms into the suburb carrying dumb-bells, breaking time-honoured social conventions and rallying the suburb to the cause of the New Woman. However, Miss Westamacott is short sighted enough to consider that only men were likely to be her enemies. She fails completely to take into account the power of the traditional woman as represented by Clara

and her sister, Ida. Afraid that their widower father, Dr Walker, had become too fascinated by the powerful and independent Miss Westamacott, the two girls set about bringing him to his senses. Their prime motive is the need to preserve in their father's memory the sanctified image of their dead mother. Their method is to pretend to be New Women for a week. Dr Walker is soon brought to his knees in a series of comic episodes (the New is always amusing) where his daughters do chemistry lessons on the breakfast tables, smoke Turkish cigarettes with their legs flung over the arms of chairs and invite their fiancés to supper without a chaperone. In a moment of revelation, Dr Walker comes to his senses:

> He had never realised before how entirely his daughters had shielded him from the friction of life. (BCS 241)

He puts Miss Westamacott firmly in her place, and she, in her turn, discovers she 'likes the doctor better the more masculine and aggressive he became.'

Despite the conflicts and crises, this Norwood world is one where the reader can be certain nothing will go fundamentally wrong. The novel is set during a hot summer, and the daily activities of tennis, cycling and walking provide a lighthearted background. The surroundings are rural. The air is filled 'with the low drone of insects', and London is only an undisturbing 'dun cloud ... stretching along the northern skyline', the meaning of which has effectively been distanced. By the end of the novel the separate individuals who had moved into the new houses on

'The Wilderness' have bound themselves together by marriage and mutual help. Through them suburbia has become a microcosm of emotional and moral life, 'a common stage' where '... love and humour and fears and lights and shadows were so swiftly succeeding each other'. (BCS 30) Out of adherence to right values spring personal happiness and laughter - the predominant tone of Beyond the City.

The suburb as a symbol of domestic bliss was clearly dear to Conan Doyle. In the Preface to a later suburban novel, A Duet (1899), he articulated his faith in the power of love, and in the suburbs as the appropriate setting for it:

> ...my aim has been, in an age of pessimism, to draw marriage as it may be, and as it often is, beautiful and yet simple, the commonplaces of life being all tinged, and softened, and glorified by the light of love. No startling adventures are here, for they do not come to such people as I have portrayed, nor would I have them sparkling and talking in aphorisms, for this is also unusual in suburban villas. It is atmosphere and the subtle, indefinable, golden-tinted atmosphere of love - which I have wished to reproduce...5

As with Walter Besant's optimistic view of class co-operation, there is no intrinsic reason why the reader should deny the possibility of personal happiness through love. It is the novel itself which questions the possibility by translating the suburbs' geographical distance from the inner city so absolutely into a moral, spiritual and personal distance but failing to find an equivalent distance for the means of its sustenance - the financial world of the City and the imperatives of the world of work.

Section 3

A second model of fictional integration is offered by William Pett Ridge's suburban novels. Thematically they are demonstrably of the same genre as Conan Doyle's. They similarly create a suburban world where the individual is allowed to assume importance. His hopes and fears take the centre of the stage within a small identifiable community. Outside the Radius is a collection of short stories about love - love between father and daughter, between sisters, between young married couples; that is, love within the family unit. As the title suggests, distance from the centre of London was also the dominant structuring and motivating force of life, as in Beyond the City. The values they convey are essentially the same - the family, the individual, the importance of domestic harmony and the importance of private worlds. And again, these values are offered as a coherent, complete world despite their acknowledged but subordinated dependence on the role of the City.

Ridge is also a satirist. In Outside the Radius he cleverly satirises 'middle-class philistinism', and the replacing of a 'working class heritage... by a facade of respectability' as P.J. Keating claims in The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction.6 However, it is the abstract not the individual he mocks, and while the satire which is directed at 'The Crescent' makes Outside the Radius entertaining, and gives his material crispness, it is always balanced by a central seriousness, the importance of the individual experience. As a contemporary review notes:

> ...he never for an instant stands aloof from his characters to laugh at or scorn their foibles or failings....Mr. Pett Ridge sees that even in a commonplace suburb the main levers of life are at work - Love, Ambition, Shame, Sacrifice...7

The nature of Ridge's satire was open to misunderstanding even in his own day. Keble Howard, also a popular writer about suburban delights, explains:

> It is so conventional to scoff at the suburbs that the unimaginative take it for granted that any work with the name of ... 'Surbiton' in the title must necessarily depend for success upon the old-fashioned treatment.8

The twinning of lightness of treatment and seriousness of intention is twofold and interlinked. In the first place, as we have already seen in the integrationist strategies used by the Grossmith brothers in Diary of a Nobody, humour is a device whereby the existence of the other person can be safely acknowledged. In that case humour was used to distance a very real sense of social threat and to harness and understand danger through ridicule. Writing ten years later, Pett Ridge's humour is less political and more paternal. He is writing in the spirit of comedy about an already fully integrated world. This allows him to question, to tease and to suggest but always within accepted values.

However, within the text, Pett Ridge creates a second fictional distance which allows a shift of tone that makes his novels quite distinct from those of Conan Doyle. This is the narrator figure who relays to readers the struggles, the defeats and successes of the inhabitants of The Crescent with amusement, concern and respect. His eye for the ridiculous, his ear for dialogue and his interest in social

phenomena sets Outside the Radius apart from Doyle's romances. It is significant that Pett Ridge also wrote novels about the inner city and the poor.9 His interests were wider, and as a novelist of the suburbs, less personally invested.

The second effect of the use of humour is its authentication of the novel's world. Even so, I cannot agree with Kate Flint that Pett Ridge's novels appealed to their readership 'which finds security in seeing itself faithfully depicted', nor that the realistic description of material objects and surroundings 'encourages a reading based on reflection theory'.10 What his novels offer is a satire on these behaviour patterns, a situation made possible only by the security, comfort of the suburbs. Embedded within the precise observations of location and suburban living patterns and the humorous recognition of the eccentricities and smallnesses of the suburban world is an object of desire as potent as Doyle's sunny romances - the absolute significance of individual experience.

The opening chapter describes the protagonist in this collection of short stories, 'The Crescent' itself, a group of houses at the end of a London tram route, curving out from the mainroad and a short cut to nowhere. It has an independent existence with a ruthless routine and a rigid set of conventions and expectations. Ridge gently ridicules these while leaving the reader in no doubt of the importance and security of this world. It is the other side of Mord Em'ly's picture of suburban life gained during her brief period as domestic servant in a small house in Peckham:

> That people should so carefully abstain from taking advantage of the happiness that life with both hands offers, appeared to her to be a minor form of insanity.11

At first this world does indeed appear conformist and class ridden. Inventories of the houses would reveal lists of similar objects. The pattern of the day is uniform from the 8.20 departure of 'its male inhabitants in search of gold' to the later exodus of 'small babies...in their hooded carriages' to the afternoon mothers' gatherings, to the eventual return of 'the detachment which went off in the morning to attack the City and to loot it...'. The inflated language is clearly ironic. Among The Crescent males there are no meteoric business men. Among The Crescent ladies no evidence of blue blood. But the chapter ends with a warning:

> I find that to declare life in The Crescent as dull and monotonous is a mere pretence; outwardly that may be so; in point of fact there are romances in every house.(OR 20)

Beneath the uniformity imposed by the speculative builder and conformity demanded by class hierarchy are revealed a range of emotions, of joys and tragedies.

There are three major means of self definition employed by inhabitants of The Crescent - class, money and marriage/family. Pett Ridge explores each of these with differing emphasis across all the stories, giving them a thematic unity which colours in the abstraction of 'The Crescent'. None of these strategies escape his satire, but they are clearly revealed as public criteria, and as such worthy of debunking. What is regarded as serious is the inner world of the individual whose fate in the narratives

is always understood and resolved through emotional not public values. It is at this personal level that Ridge allows his characters and their suburban world to abdicate responsibility for the larger world that created them and invites his readers to celebrate this delimited, detached perspective as substantial.

An example of this approach is offered by Ridge's portrayal of the class war, the most pervasive of these three themes. Individual narratives that emphasise this theme are 'The Education of Mrs Gregory', 'The Case of Dr Law' and 'A Dash for Freedom'. Here, in The Crescent, the dust has settled - almost. The ambiguities that still exist are indicated by the sensitivity of all ranks to the precise position of everyone in the hierarchy. He draws with amusing precision the new middle class in the process of evolution. As in The Diary of a Nobody a servant is a mark of superiority but also a constant anxiety. It is the servants who hold the power for they represent the last vestiges of feudal certainties. Yet the nature of their power is entirely generated by the contemporary redefining of class identity. What they have is actually a psychological power since it is on their presence and behaviour that the family's standing is assessed.

However, within the text, the battles for class definition have no political significance, only personal significance which is played out in a series of anecdotes. What might have been seen as an extension of the class struggles of the inner city are arguably reinterpreted

through two different forms of struggle. The first echoes Conan Doyle, transferring the battle from the political arena of class against class to the moral arena of City against suburb; in other words from public life to private life. The second intensifies the importance of the individual by setting the battle between husband and wife, neighbour and neighbour, father and daughter. The two-layered struggle for a moral and a personal identity interlock to create a closed dynamic for Pett Ridge's suburban world. The outcome of the first - the necessary repression of the true nature of the City/suburban relationship - increases the importance of the resolution of the second. A happy family and a harmonious community offer the potential of absorbing the tensions set up by the repression of the implications of political, public and urban life.

Different as Conan Doyle's and Pett Ridge's suburban novels are, they share considerable common ground. Their novels repress the realism they purport to recreate. Their central intention is not to record an observed situation. Rather they construct a desirable life-style by anchoring it to recognisable work, domestic and material patterns that are largely accurate in referential terms. But what is recognisable is not necessarily actual, as we have already seen in comparable slum novels such as Walter Besant's romances. This is particularly true of Doyle's novels. Their 'golden-tinted atmosphere' is deliberately created as a model and not as an imitation or reflection. There is no

mistaking its deliberate divorce from the world of the everyday which created and explained it. However, in general, these texts present themselves as objects of desire, or thematise fantasies which validate a suburban way of life.

The images and attitudes encountered in Beyond the City and Outside the Radius are pervasive in novels of the period. In Shan Bullock's The Barrys, for instance, Marian's and Frank's flat at Camberwell is the moral base of their lives. When Frank begins to roam the streets of Walworth, it is merely a matter of time before he is unfaithful to his wife. When Marian discovers his infidelity, she rejects him. Simultaneously, she leaves the flat, still furnished and to all appearances unchanged, but devoid now of the spirit of love that gave it meaning. When the couple are reconciled they meet at the old flat which has been waiting for them. As Frank rounds the corner seeing his home again is 'like sighting heaven from the portals of Purgatory'. Earlier in the novel the couple had been observed by a friend through their window in an image reminiscent of Nell's picture of Arthur through the window of his South Kensington flat in A City Girl by Margaret Harkness.

> They [Frank and Marian] stood side by side, faces aglow and their eyes rapt in admiration of the boy. Now Frank clapped his hands, now shook his curls, now turned towards the tall lady and laughed...There is a hush...The child looks from one to another; suddenly stretches its arms, and with a cry of 'Father's boy', is carried to Frank's shoulder...12

In both novels the window is used as a delimiting frame,

marking out the ideal domestic life from the moral chaos of the streets.

In A Clever Wife, by William Pett Ridge, this ideal is realised. Cicely, the clever wife of the title, returns gratefully to Clapham at the end of the novel having given up her fight for independence as a writer. Only the lightest touch of amnusement is intended when she says to her newly reconciled husband, '"I had no idea that the suburbs could contain joy"'.13 In an earlier, more substantial novel, this same ideal is achieved by Mark Rutherford after much mental and emotional pain in Autobiography and Deliverance (1881) and, in an awkward compromise, by Mr Lewisham amd his wife in the uncomfortably purple ending of Love and Mr Lewisham (1900) by H.G. Wells. No wonder The Daily Telegraph felt moved to comment in its review of that novel that :

> A curious wave of what one might call domestic sentiment seems to be sweeping over the novelist of today...14

Section 4

The novels George Gissing wrote in the first part of the 1890s offer a dramatically different perspective on the nature of suburban life. Whereas the novels of Doyle and Pett Ridge repress the extent of the connections between City and suburb, Gissing reveals it as a powerful strand of the individual subconscious. New Grub Street was published in 1891 and marked the shift in his selection of material.

Writers, intellectuals, and the lower middle classes are the central characters of New Grub Street. The abject poor and the working classes in slum locations no longer hold a preeminent position. This novel also marks a shift in Gissing's treatment of the city - a treatment which is explored and developed in The Odd Women (1893).

The most noticeable change is the widening of the canvas. The locations of the novels from 1890-96 are not confined to the narrowness of specific London districts. They range freely, moving out from the centre to northern and southern suburbs. Sometimes, as in In The Year of Jubilee and The Women, they move away from London to locations in the country or by the sea for significant parts of the narrative. Secondly, the specificity of street names and urban landmarks, characteristic of the pre-1890 novels, which emphasises the concrete and controlling nature of urban structures begins to diffuse, even to disappear. The immediacy of urban experience itself gradually becomes subordinate to the portrayal of the psychology it creates in different groupings: the intellectual, the single woman, the entrepeneur.

This process of detachment whereby the relationship of citizen to city is able to be obscured by freedom from poverty and security of class status follows a chronological development in Gissing's writing. In New Grub Street, London is submerged in fog and rarely described. The metaphorical network that sets up a counterpoint of room and street in the early novels is reapplied to the interiors of rooms and

psychic interiors in a way that obfuscates rather than reveals the nature of the city. London re-emerges from the fog in The Odd Women as a system of rail amd road grids, a timetabled space across which the characters travel. Here ease of mobility has apparently broken down the kind of blocks and obstacles that imprisoned the characters of Thyrza and The Nether World. In the Year of Jubilee is drawn up as a cultural map and the nature of the city's influence is distanced even further. Here, the intractability of urban structures is effectively disguised by the proliferation of mobile, ephemeral and decorative phenomena. Together these novels portray a chameleon city, superficially a mere reflection of its inhabitants' interests and needs. However, the extent of the invisibility of its power is in direct proportion to the sense of power individuals feel they have over themselves and their own identity.

On the surface of these novels Gissing makes play with the common contemporary assumption that suburban London is fundamentally different from, and consequently superior, culturally and morally, to inner City life. The realities of the slums which he used in earlier novels to reveal the psychological prisons they created for those who inhabited them, and the deadly interaction between those urban structures and individual growth, seem to be ameliorated historically and topographically by the opening out of space in these novels, of space that is known and understood.

Although the suburbs were rapidly spreading during the years 1891-1896, the increasingly efficient railway system

paradoxically reduced London to manageable proportions. The cries of horror at the 'octopus' of sprawling London were, as I have shown, directed largely by aesthetic reponses and partly by a sense of wasted opportunities. The helpless sense of the 'vastness' of London and moral incomprehension in the face of unfamiliar and threatening social problems were rapidly fading. Gone, apparently, was the topographical intractability of the cramped inner City. In its place was a London whose railway arches and bridges were conductors of energy across space, where junctions transformed one square mile into the potential of hundreds.

The masters of the newly liberated City were the middle-classes, and here again Gissing exploits an assumption that with a move from the slums to the suburbs, the reader enters a City purpose built for men's convenience and pleasure where the structures and processes are initiated, implemented and controlled by men. Ostensibly, this is a London that does not expose moral contradictions. It promises physical liberation which would enable the individual consciousness to expand. The middle class experience of urban structures created by and for them must necessarily be different from the experience of the working classes forced to seek survival within alien structures that render them powerless.

Section 5

This disappearance of urban imperatives behind the disguise of suburban living is re-enacted in New Grub Street. Even though the reader is told that London is its location, an acceptance of this fact is paralleled by an awareness that the external world is barely visible. The fog that envelops London closes down the reader's focus to small, claustrophobic units. Names such as Gloucester Gate, Camden Town and Great Portland Street, for all their authenticity, provide only an illusory familiarity. The location New Grub Street is invisible, a concept. Once upon a time a reality, Grub Street is now metamorphosed and it is in this city-within-a-city that the characters move. This technique sets up the conundrum of the novel. Physical landscape dissolves into the amoral landscape of Grub Street. Similarly, the reader learns that whatever may have been assumed to be physically real - articles, books, furniture, bosses - are dissolved into political, literary and social concepts that inform the characters' mode of life. This creates a world that is hauntingly intangible, while simultaneously insistent and intractable. The profoundest reality appears to be how we conceive our world and not how we perceive it. By focusing his search for a language on the state of contemporary language as it was used by writers conditioned by urban processes, Gissing created the fabric of his novel from the dominant voices of literary discourse in the 1890s. The synthesis of these

voices, I will argue, creates a complex moral and political statement.

Three relevant aspects of this statement emerge. The first concerns class definition. Gissing's middle class educated suburban dwellers are seen to be essentially members of the working class - that is, those classes who sell their labour for money on an open market. Within the novel, the social distinctions between middle-class and working-class are as inflexible as ever and are recorded with Gissing's usual sense of referential authenticity. However, he probes the specifically sociological significance of appearances to reveal their fundamentally political one.

This is made plain in New Grub Street when Marian is working in the British Museum Reading Room. Occurring early in the novel and soon after the transfer of the location to London, it highlights the nature of class mobility. Playing on the reader's assumption of the implicit value of the Reading Room, Gissing investigates the nature of the relationship of the intellectual to that environment and the activities that take place there by exploiting the effect on Marian's consciousness. She hovers uneasily between 'fact' and 'fantasy'. The facts are her exhaustion, her recognition of the parasitical nature of her work, the 'need for earning money' and 'the work of literary manufacture'. Viewed in this way the Reading Room becomes a centralized warehouse of raw materials, organised and powered by an invisible energy that maintains a 'ceaseless hum', a phrase evocative of

Herman Melville's 'The Tartarus of Maids' where physical and sexual energy is diverted to power the 'ceaseless hum' that produces acres of blank paper. The Reading Room is as surely Marian's destination each morning as the dock gate is for the docker, as she ' made her usual way to the Museum' and 'toiled there among the other toilers.'

The second point concerns Gissing's analysis of a socially constructed consciousness, an analysis which is recognisably Marxist. It is easier to appreciate the function of Gissing's vivid and detailed description of rooms if we read them as a visual complement to a daily spoken language. In New Grub Street Gissing successfully extends the technique employed as early as Workers in the Dawn, of using movement from room to street, or stasis within rooms to externalise a language of the subconscious and so make explicit a specific state of socially produced consciousness. The objects of daily living - clothes, possessions, furniture - are invested with a social significance that each member of society has learned to read, and then, by transforming these value phenomena into facts, uses to construct his/her own identity. The noting of the screen which divides Reardon's kitchen into two, enabling a portion of it to be used as a dining room; the euphemistic 'open cupboard' which describes both the pantry and the coal house in his later room at Islington; the 'small scrap of weedy carpet' all define precisely the economic and class worlds he inhabits at a given point of the narrative. The selectiveness of the descriptions

suggests that it is these objects which hold the most significance for their owners. As Reardon says when considering whether to carpet his room, a carpet was 'not his due'. He judges and punishes himself according to the ruthless but minute details of the norms of social distinctions. Amy's experience is identical:

> Eight flights of stairs, consisting alternately of eight and nine steps. Amy made the calculation, and wondered what was the cause of this arrangement. (NGS 76)

Amy may well not have perceived the direct link between height of abode and economic status, but it was documented by Booth.15

This entry of the contemporary phenomena of London into the construction of personal identity is paralleled by the function of the past. Gissing shows the layering of history in individual consciousness through the nexus of images and emotions that cluster around two specific words - 'Poverty' and 'Love' - which focus changes in attitude to both economic and personal issues. None of the major characters have experienced poverty when the novel opens - that is, not poverty of the kind known to Pennyloaf Hewitt in The Nether World. They are one layer of society up from it, one fraction of history and education away from it. Yet each one is conditioned by the fear of it. Particular words echo setting up patterns of fear and helplessness. Alfred Yule's first thought on his blindness, despite a lifetime of modest security, is 'of the workhouse'. The outward expression of this paranoia - the words - exist, but a direct experience of their meaning has been replaced by a

learned response. On the one hand it induces a helpless drift towards loss of identity, as in the case of Reardon, who develops a pathological fear of the word and whose days and nights are marked out by the sounding of the workhouse bell. On the other it acts as a spur towards an acceptance of society's survival tactics as Jasper demonstrates.16

In New Grub Street the process of repression noted in the novels discussed earlier is revealed by Gissing to be a social phenomenon rather than a literary device. Economic and social forces emerge as the powerful influences, marginalising personal needs and individual growth. From this socially constructed repression comes the 'dream'. Poole in Gissing in Context attributes this to Gissing's refusal to envisage improvement and to keeping the dream:

> ...as usual in Gissing...so distant from the reality that it cannot inter-act or transform.17

That is not the case. The stress set up between an individual's unarticulated needs and his/her socially constructed identity fosters a retreat into an imaginary vision. The palliative for loss of meaning and control is fiction making or 'dreaming' - an apparent therapy for the individual but an opportunity for further control by a society which pre-empts dissatisfaction by diverting it into a compensatory pleasure world:

> ...nothing can induce working class men or women to read stories that treat of their own world. They are the most consumed idealists in creation... (NGS 416)

Here we can see clearly the relationship between the texts discussed in this chapter. The divorce between personal

needs and public imperatives analysed by Gissing reveals the social context which created the need for the romances of Doyle and Pett Ridge.

Gissing's achievement in New Grub Street is to push the boundaries of the realistic representation of London in such a way that he can move beyond the obvious social differences between the working classes and the middle classes to reveal the common forces acting upon all groups. On one level the novel creates a realistic surface, as intimately known and realised as the more famous contemporary portrayal by Conan Doyle of Sherlock Holmes' Baker Street. But that realistic surface is ambiguous. The literary world that inhabits it becomes a metaphor of society's struggle for a place in the economic promised land. Its language, claimed by the market place, makes all pervasive the power of economic factors in direct contrast to the novels of Doyle and Pett Ridge where the City is always distant and controlled. What emerges is the sense of a world of shifting surfaces, of unstable realities, behind which lie repressed crucial moral and spiritual issues which are denied articulation.

In The Odd Women Gissing's treatment of London foregrounds the issue of individual freedom by counterpointing ease of communication and transport across the widening terrain of suburban London with the frustration of individual choice. A surface realism is carefully established as Monica catches a bus from one end of Kennington Road to another; Rhoda loiters in Chelsea Gardens

and Virginia hesitates, confused by the vortex of Charing Cross station. The novel establishes a similar sociological authenticity. The addresses Gissing chooses for his triangle of couples define precisely their existing relationship to the class structure.18 Virginia and Alice rot quietly in Lavender Hill's declining gentility, beleaguered by Clapham Junction and encroaching working class housing developments. Monica and Widdowson are isolated in their respectable retreat at Herne Hill. Rhoda and Mary, intellectual and forward looking, reside in the growing distinction of Chelsea. Initially, these addresses are linked by an over view where space seems unvexatious. Not only do the locations of the novel move to Jersey, Clevedon, Cheddar, France and elsewhere, but within London itself there is the possibility of crossing boundaries and defining personal areas in a way that seems to defy excitingly the controlling streets of Clerkenwell and Lambeth, or the invisible spirit of New Grub Street. The centring of women as the characters of action emphasises this point. They walk the streets and travel freely in the spirit of independence, not as the sexually exploited or dispossessed.

Yet the spatial freedom evoked early in the novel also becomes an illusion disguising a very different existential reality. The fixed relationships of Lavender Hill and Chelsea for instance, are easily negotiable by foot, train or hansom, but the ideological distances are far harder to negotiate. Virginia and Alice cling to their tiny room and make the journey to Chelsea only once. Driven by the same

repressive process as Reardon and Biffen, they internalise Rhoda's practical plans for their future into dreams, endlessly reiterating, 'We will open a school for young/ children'. (ODW 444-45) Gissing insists on the closeness of the Madden sisters to one of London's biggest junctions. Proudly they declare, 'We can be independent...', but the giant network of Clapham Junction mocks their growing inability to leave their room, and their mental and spiritual paralysis.

Widdowson also seeks stillness and isolation as a means to maintain his dream. In his villa at Herne Hill, he wishes to recreate a Ruskinian family in a suburban idyll. Whereas the Madden sisters are helpless, totally unconscious of the nature of their position, Widdowson is deeply conscious of the need to sever links with the City if he is to achieve his dream. Gissing locates his suburban villa on the direct route south from the City, the place of his hated clerkdom. It is the road which runs through Walworth Road, where Monica works, to the first point of rural semi-detachnment. Like the families in Conan Doyle's Beyond the City, Widdowson wants the road out of the City, but not back again. Gissing demonstrates how the logic of urban structures makes this impossible. Both he and Monica are drawn back into London again and again.

The logic is again an ideological one. Widdowson has the economic security that gives him a surer grasp than the Madden sisters on the system he supports, but not the class pedigreee. The suburban villa which promises to be a

suburban retreat cannot be completed within its own implied system of values which required a desirable middle class marriage. Widdowson takes to the roads to find a wife. He totally fails to perceive that his longed-for stability is adrift on the urban fluidity of class redefinition, economic fortune and communications. Unlike his fictional counterparts in the novels of Doyle and Pett Ridge, his adoption of Ruskin is shown to be merely a rationalisation of his deep seated fear of change. Widdowson's suburban road leads him to a mental fossilisation that is self-destructive. Like the Madden sisters he cowers behind a demonstrably outmoded middle class morality, entrenched in an ideological isolation ridiculed by the processes that created him.

While the Madden sisters and Widdowson attempt to define themselves through fixity and stasis, Monica, who is of the younger generation, sees the streets and movement through them as full of promise. At the beginning of the novel she revels in 'free wandering about London'. (ODW 33) The first threat to her independence is when Widdowsom marks out her territorial limits around the store where she works in Walworth Road, and later around her room in Great Portland Street. After marriage, unsure of the nature of independence within marriage, she demands the right to move freely, but the distances covered require changes of consciousness. Monica's increasingly frenetic travel finds no haven of consciousness, no justification for her independence. She is ill at ease at Chelsea, panic stricken

at Bayswater and enervated at Lavender Hill.

Her freedom is restricted in another way.

> Railway time was the precursor of Greenwich Mean Time, a national standard required to produce a national timetable. 19

London's vast size could now be reckoned in minutes. Gissing brilliantly exploits this contemporary fact as Monica prepares for her fateful journey to see Bevis. Her anxious watching of the clock first alerts Widdowson's suspicions. From that moment to their return to Herne Hill, Gissing plots the time taken, the time wasted, the time required as the trains shunt Monica from place to place. It is the timetable that pushes her home as, utterly confused, she contemplates a return with horror:

> One had just gone; another would leave in about a quarter of an hour. (ODW 320)

The insistence of the timetable forces her decision, 'There was just time to catch the train now departing for Herne Hill'. (ODW 321) Monica asserts her right to go out alone only once more. She travels to Chelsea to explain herself to Rhoda and there she acknowledges her situation as only a 'semblance of freedom'.

Urban movement in The Odd Women, then, creates a consciousness diametrically opposite to the Doyle's happy suburbanites. It creates physical and emotional exhaustion and psychic claustrophia. In In the Year of Jubilee, this idea is developed to explore the transformation of the notion of culture. Urban mobility is still used as a central metaphor but expresses ideas of transitoriness and shallowness, particularly in relation to the superficiality

of culture, relationships, manners and learning. Nancy Lord is offered as one of several models. Her opinions are unformulated and her response to society uncritical. She is offered as a new breed of economically independent and educated young woman with no specific role in life. She drops a reference to Nineteenth Century magazine to impress Tarrant, but she will not read it. She borrows a book on evolution - again to impress- but is bored with the subject and its implications. Such a rejection of historical and social contexts, Gissing implies, leads to directionless egotism. She felt that '...she was the mid point of the universe'.20 The movement of the masses which throng to witness the Jubilee procession make up part of the slippery surface from which solid values derived from tradition, history and experience have become detached.

The novels that Gissing wrote in the 1890s inhabit a middle-class suburban world where the associative power of the word 'London' to poverty and degradation inherited from the experiences of the eighties was being displaced. That particular public experience was being internalised as part of the history of contemporary consciousness and assuming a corresponding power as a psychological motif. Acting as an element of the subconscious, the image of the abyss is the driving force that motivates the greed of Jasper Milvain, Reardon's escapism and Amy's faithlessness. Gissing's analysis of suburban values and psychology completely jettisoned any rus-in-urbe romanticism or Ruskinian domestic ideal. The suburban psychology Gissing explored is not

divorced or distanced from the City as in the novels of Doyle, Pett Ridge and Howard, but shaped by it - a further stage in the evolution of contemporary consciousness. What Gissing suggests then is that the process is progressive in chronological terms, but a gyre in moral terms. The suburbs moved outwards promising a new freedom and new possibilities but their re-enactment of inner city class and economic structures threatened a psychological spiral away from moral and cultural clarity in direct relation to their distance from the immediacy of urban experience.

A more generally critical view of the suburbs as a particular mode of living was not to emerge strongly until the early twentieth century when the mood was changing yet again. J.F. Causton's Comedy of a Suburban Chapel attacked the vanity fair of suburban religion, where levels of morality were determined solely by money and social standing. The portrait of John Blout, the pillar of the Church, the embodiment of the philosophy 'that a good man will be a prosperous man', is a most perceptive study of a suburban bigot.21 In 1904, G.K. Chesterton's debunking of social prophecy, The Napoleon of Notting Hill (1904), was located in the well known suburb to heighten its absurdity and in H.G. Wells' later novels, Ann Veronica (1909) and The New Machiavelli (1911), the suburbs are the creators of prejudice and repression, symbolic of England's moral and political chaos - an image far removed from the fictional image of the 1890s.

NOTES

1. Arthur Conan Doyle, Beyond the City: the Idyl of a Suburb in The Great Shadow and Beyond the City (London, 1893). Afterwards referred to in the text as BCS followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

2. W. Pett Ridge, Outside the Radius, Stories of a London Suburb (London, 1899). Afterwards referred to in the text as OR followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

3. George Gissing, New Grub Street, edited and with an introduction by Bernard Bergonzi (London, 1968). First published in 1891. Afterwards referred to in the text as NGS followed by the page number.
George Gissing, The Odd Women (London, 1905). First published in 1893. Afterwards referred to in the text as ODW followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.
George Gissing, In the Year of Jubilee (New York, 1982). First published 1895.

4. John Dickson Carr, The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (London, 1949), p. 85

5. Arthur Conan Doyle, A Duet, with an Occasional Chorus (London, 1903), p. vii. First published 1899.

6. P.J. Keating, The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, p. 212.

7. Bookman, 17 (February 1900), p. 153.

8. Keble Howard, The Smiths of Valley View (London, 1909), Preface.

9. See W. Pett Ridge, Mord Em'ly (London, 1898) and A Son of the State (London, 1900).

10. Kate Flint, 'Fictional Suburbia', Literature and History, 8:1 (Spring 1982), pp. 67 - 81 (p. 75).

11. W. Pett Ridge, Mord Em'ly (London, 1901), p. 42. First published 1898.

12. Shan Bullock, The Barrys(London and New York, 1899), p. 274.

13. W. Pett Ridge, A Clever Wife (London, 1895), p. 392.

14. Unsigned Review, Daily Telegraph, 6 June 1900, p. 11.

15. Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People, Vol. 2 (London, 1891) p. 297. 'Poverty in these streets usually goes by floors; the poorest people, often extremely poor, are to be found at the top of the houses, and as you descend floor by floor the position mends'.

16. For a reading of New Grub Street from a Social Darwinism perspective, see John Goode, Ideology and Fiction, pp. 116-146.

17. Adrian Poole, Gissing in Context, p. 143.

18. See the Poverty Maps for the S.E. and S.W. regions in the appendix to Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People, Vol. 2 (London, 1891).

19. Jean Dethier, All Stations: A Journey through 150 Years. An exhibition from the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris and London, 1981), p. 67.

20. George Gissing, In the Year of Jubilee (London, 1895), p. 104.

21. J.F. Causton, The Comedy of a Suburban Chapel (London, 1901) p. 218.

CHAPTER FIVE

LONDON AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD : THE SECULARISATION OF CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE IN THE WORK OF A.O. JAY AND STEWART HEADLAM, 1886-1890

The shared assumptions of Christian ethics as expressed through Christian discourse can be seen to underpin the arguments of many of those who wrote about social conditions in the inner city and the suburbs. The moral questions that had been raised were necessarily the concern of the Churches. Of course, many of those who contributed to the debate, such as Andrew Mearns, were inspired by Christian values and were working within Church structures. However, many others, of whom George Sims is an example, wrote from a position of moral outrage informed by those values. Even Booth, despite his declared intention of absolute objectivity, was unable to divest himself entirely of a received language informed by Christian principles in his survey. I now intend to look more closely at how Christianity's role in relation to London's poor began to be defined through a specifically Christian literature which attempted to make the fulfilment of material needs a priority over spiritual needs. My starting point is an investigation of the contribution of two churchmen who, in

their different ways, struggled to bring the Church into the centre of the social debate and to evolve a secular Christian language.

The first is the Reverend Anthony Osborne Jay (1856-1943), who entered the stream of contemporary history in December 1886 when he became the Vicar of Holy Trinity, Shoreditch, one of the most notorious areas in East London. For ten years he was to be a dominating figure in Christianity's fight for public credibility and for a dynamic role in a rapidly changing society. The peculiar interest of Father Jay (as he was called in the manner of many High Church vicars) was that his ministry became a model by which the Church's success in reaching the poor working classes was measured. As information about his ministry circulated, he became a living myth, an embodiment of a form of practical Christianity that was particularly satisfying to contemporary needs because it was perceived as being demonstrably effective. In fact, the opinions of sociologists and historians as to the extent and significance of his success varied. However, it was the version created by journalists and, more ambiguously, by novelists that caught the public imagination. An analysis of the portrayal of Father Jay and his activities - created with his willing co-operation, not to say initiative - shows his public image to be a construct of society's hopes and beliefs, the desired Messianic interpreter of the Old in terms of the New.

The second priest I will discuss is the Reverend

Stewart Headlam (1847-1924), a member of the Guild of St Matthew and editor of The Church Reformer from 1884 to 1895. Primarily a theologian, Headlam identified strongly with the Christian Socialist tradition after meeting its founder, the ageing F.D. Maurice, during his first curacy in Drury Lane in 1870. He was a leading contributor to the reinterpretation of Christian Socialism for the eighties, and gained some notoriety for the unlikely alliances his convictions created for him. Charles Bradlaugh, the politician and fervent exponent of secularism, and Oscar Wilde, were only two of those whom he publicly supported. However, unlike Jay, his interest for my argument lies not in his person and his life but in the new theology he attempted to construct. In his writings, he systematically paralleled the language of Christian doctrine with the language of Socialism. His objective was to disentangle what he saw as the original Christian message from its historical accretions, and in so doing to argue for the social and political obligations of Christians and the centrality of Christian doctrine to a healthy society.

Jay and Headlam were each representative of powerful schools of contemporary Christian thought, and, for different reasons, became the public faces of their schools of thought.1 Jay reaffirmed and renegotiated the weakened role of the parish priest. Headlam developed from Maurice's Christian Socialism a radical theology in which political and Christian action were seen as one and the same thing. Jay's life as it was interpreted in contemporary writings

and Headlam's own pamphlets can be read as another stage in the controversy set up by the writings of the early social commentators. In those writings we observed the tension created by describing what seemed a new phenomenon in a received language embodying traditional Christian ethics and social hierarchies, and the inadequacies that were revealed in that language. Men such as Jay and Headlam took up the challenge to reassert the capacity of Christian discourse to express and explain social conditions.

It was for this reason that they were both committed to secularisation, that is the expression of Christian values through social action rather than Church ritual. However, to achieve such an objective posed a peculiar problem for Christian discourse. Christians did not want to break free entirely of Christian assumptions in language but to emphasise particular aspects of their significance. In studying how a language which had become identified with spiritual concerns could be reforged as the secular language of the working classes we discover a displacement of those metaphorical networks concerned with the articulation of spiritual meanings. This created a specific need to reconstruct metaphor to retain the spiritual meanings subordinated by secularisation and to resolve the tensions between materialist and spiritual world views. Significantly, that need was met by a complex web of fiction making which attempted to sustain and realise a harmonious balance between a secular and a spiritual approach to social problems.

Section 2

The Reverend Arthur Osborne Jay was an orthodox High Church vicar of the Church of England. He believed in the need for an effective and powerful Church structure, and he believed passionately in the organisation of that Church into parishes and the personal role of the parish priest within it.2 His personality was less orthodox. He was physically strong, extrovert and inexhaustibly energetic. He did not suffer fools gladly, deploring the narrowness of those who used such terms as 'Dirty', 'beyond reform', 'unthankful', 'dissolute' and 'depraved' with which to dismiss the poor, and claiming that the Church was '...dying of respectability' (SP 37). On the other hand, he was supportive, generous and caring to his parishioners. He had an unerring eye for self-advertisement, but a disgust of religious or any other gimmickry, such as that employed by General Booth, 'that Panjandrum of the market-place' as Jay called him.3 Clearly it was these personal qualities that gave him the enduring influence he established in one of London's most desperate and hard-pressed slums, while the extremity of the situation he was faced with contributed to the high profile he had in the public's mind. In Shoreditch, his reputation lived on long after his retirement.4

Jay wrote several books and pamphlets about social questions, and was a regular correspondent to The Times. In Life in Darkest London (1891), The Social Problem : its possible Solution (1893), and A Story of Shoreditch (1896),

he set out the details of his own ministry, the nature of the problems he was facing, and explored some possible solutions to them.5 These books hold intrinsic interest as the first hand record of a man closely involved in the East End slums. Jay's writing is at its best when he is dealing with anecdote and experiential realities where his energetic involvement and personal qualities are conveyed, and where his flair for colourful writing has considerable scope.6

Many of Jay's anecdotes in his book centre on his knowing and caring about 'the world...of reality'. (SS 3) His personal capacity to accept what he saw in a way that was both movingly free of judgement and patronage and full of appreciation and wry admiration of Old Nichol survival patterns, was the source of his secular vision. It enabled him to insist inflexibly and consistently to his parishioners that there were alternative ways of living without their apparently feeling condemned or rejected. He appeared to share with Charles Booth the feeling that the East End was 'reality' in the sense that pretence and facade had been stripped away leaving a 'rush of human life as fascinating to watch as the current of a river....this excitement of life which can accept murder as a dramatic incident...looked at this way, what a drama it is!'7

However, these books contributed little that was new in ideas. The reforms Jay outlined differed little from contemporary reformist schemes: improved housing, education geared to working class needs, working hours and law reform. He was particularly astute about the legal system which he

claimed did not attack crime itself but the victims of it that the law could catch, and simply reaffirmed the value of property over people. Along with General Booth he advocated help with emigration for those who wished to go. His second book The Social Problem reveals a resistance to seeing the questions of day to day necessities as symptomatic of a wider malaise. It is his weakest book, published in 1893 as a response to General Booth's social programme as set out in In Darkest England. The pedantic categorisation of solutions and failures is superficial and predictable. His own 'final' solution of the 'final' problem of the hopeless submerged - to segregate them sexually and to confine them for life to 'humane' camps - appears unacceptable today. Like Charles Booth and William Booth he found it hard to dismiss entirely the belief that heredity was partly responsible for anti-social behaviour despite his impassioned question:

> How dare we go on judging so harshly, and ruling so unevenly, these the victims of our own wretched, faulty, barbarous social system? (SP 97)

and his own answer that it is:

> ...our social system (which) treads down and beats out and destroys, as far as it can, all hope and life, and inducement to labour. (SP 10)

Jay was equally resistant to linking Christian action with political action. These reforms would arise, he implied, from the lifting of ignorance and the power of the Church brought to bear on the 'Well-being of humanity' (SP 135) His religion appears radical - 'Give up what you have and follow me' - 'Love your neighbour as yourself' - 'the

meek shall inherit the earth' - the essential Christian virtues that arraign themselves against individualism, power and capitalism. But the possible clash of ideas and the resulting questions that might have led him to political conclusions did not take place. Like Booth, facts and experience pushed him towards the dangerous waters of political change, and towards the formulation of crucial political questions:

> Why is poverty essential?....it may be that the day will dawn when some great economist shall arise with the answer ready. Not, it is true, by tinkering ways or bribery methods, but in a bold, broad, comprehensive spirit, such as alone can perform the herculean task required. (LDL 120)

However, centred specifically in Christian concerns, he appears unaffected by the ideas of Marx which were beginning to influence political thought at this time and able even to stop short of Booth's 'quasi-Socialism'.8 Along with the language of Socialism, he rejected all available contemporary discourses. He used no political forum such as the Fabian Tracts which had begun in 1886. He argued no theological overview such as his contemporary Stewart Headlam did through the Guild of St Matthew. He relied on the reponse of one human being to another, and attempted to forge a new voice of radical humanism from an unspoken Christian doctrinal foundation.

Section 2

It was through the orthodoxy of the parish and his presence as parish priest that Jay created his unorthodox version of secularised Christianity. He championed the cause of the parish in a city where the logic of the parish community had largely broken down. He hoped to replace the sense of being the outcasts of society - a state induced by the topographical realities of the Old Nichol - with a sense of being members of Holy Trinity, a visible structure which was the immediate concern of the parish priest. Jay, wishing to confirm that it was:

> ...the very business of religion to provide for the well being of humanity both now and in the life to come. (SP 135)

set about translating Christian principles into secular action.

To achieve such an objective, the power of Christianity had to be seen to be at least as constant and pervasive as the counter forces of bad housing, filthy conditions and appalling poverty. Only by achieving this positive secular identity for Christianity could misguided opposition to the secular be broken down. Parish work was the ideal secular expression of Christian beliefs though it required hard, often unrewarding and certainly unsung labour. Jay had the greatest contempt for dabblers such as the philanthropists and Settlement workers who moved into the East End for short term projects.9 General Booth filled him with an anger that seems tinged with envy, perhaps not at Booth's success which

he disputed, but at his powers of self-advertisement which overshadowed less sensational projects but achieved less.10 Great schemes, visionary schemes were the order of the day, but Jay felt they had little to do with the daily business of establishing a 'foundation of social order and coherence out of which a spiritual life might develop:

> ...to be parochially minded appears to many soaring thinkers a great and lasting loss; and yet someone must do the work...or.../ the world will go wrong. The world, that is, of reality: the world, not of politics and diplomacy, and art and fashion: but the world of poverty and shame, and vice and misery. (SS 2-3).

By differentiating between two worlds Jay did not simply put an emphasis on the gap between classes or material privilege, but rather between the world of ideas and the world of experience. He felt that the world of ideas had an illusory breadth, creating a spurious sense of unity and achievement that would soon prove to be adrift through diversity, anomaly and individual tragedy. The world of reality had depth, accepting experience as its criterion. Parochialism dealt directly with this reality. Shorn of its pejorative weight, this word implied a living, diverse body of individuals welded into a community by the shared knowledge of certain values, even though those values did not necessarily influence behaviour. He did not believe that he had the power to convert or to bring spiritual revelation to anyone. The dialectic he conveys in the numerous narratives that made up his books was acted out in his life. What he offered was himself and his actions in a secular context as evidence of a different way of perceiving human

relationship. He allowed himself - his physical presence - to be the counterpoint to Old Nichol values. While stealing, cheating and surviving as they always had, nevertheless the inhabitants of the Old Nichol slums were forced to acknowledge another system of values existing in their own streets.

How then did Jay bridge the divide between the community he served and himself in practice? It would be simple and attractive to claim that he was a saint, whose impact was achieved through his impressive goodness. The answer revolves around a more complex area of finding a communication point between a working class culture unable or unused to articulating spiritual and moral ideas, and the Church whose language is imbued with them. This means to understanding across class and moral codes seems to be rooted in Jay's personal uniqueness.

Jay was aware of the dangers of charismatic leadership but he did not see himself in this light. (SS 21-22) He accepted his own uniqueness, as he did his parishioners', but that uniqueness was his humanity and every individual had the power to express that in his or her own way. The aspects of his ministry which were to attract so much attention all grew from this determination to break through conventional social relationships to translate Christ's message into a form and language appropriate to the people with whom he was working.

Section 3

It is now important to identify those precise features of Jay's ministry that were perceived as the most innovative which caught the public imagination and which became the foundation of a dominant fictional image of the slum priest. Jay's considerable prestige as a public figure from about 1887 to 1900 centred around four major aspects: his striking personality; the Men's Club; the environment and practice of Church services and his success with what was considered the impossible task of bringing religion to the Old Nichol. The first of these I have already looked at briefly.

The Men's Club and the Church were both housed in the same building. Downstairs was a large public room furnished with chairs and tables, a boxing ring, some gymnasium equipment and a couple of bunks for the homeless. The upstairs room was reached by a spiral staircase and also ran over the stabling of the adjoining building. It was here that Jay himself lived for two years, transforming the ground floor into a social club and the first floor into a church.

The aim of the Men's Club was not to provide an alternative kind of entertainment to the street or the pub, but an alternative environment and mode of conduct for existing leisure activities. This formula was more exceptional than it may at first appear in that, although the approach is clearly informed by standards of middle

class behaviour, the spirit was rather of human respect. How completely the Club became absorbed into the daily life of the Old Nichol is testified to by Arthur Harding who grew up there under Father Jay's ministry. In his memoirs, he casually comments while reminiscing about friends and family, how his half brother became part of a locally well known comic duo after experiments at 'Father Jay's club...that's where he used to learn the tricks of the trade,' and how a friend, Billy Warner, went to 'Father Jay's. That's where he learnt to box'.11

Jay himself rarely talked of 'success'. Success implies completion, a concrete level of achievement susceptible to objective measurement. Jay was far too absorbed in the daily nature of his work and far too consciously in pursuit of social and spiritual growth to be interested in such superficial conclusions. He did, however, keep a careful record of his activities. His personal parish records note every pastoral visit and the contact, if any, that tenants had with Holy Trinity. Church attenders were few, but contact with the Church pervasive.12 A record of houses in Old Nichol Street, the most notorious street in the parish, taken for 1892, five years after his arrival, provides a striking example of this pervasiveness. Out of 40 tenants, only three had no contact at all with Holy Trinity. Of the remainder, all went to one or more of Church services, Bible classes, Mothers' Meetings, Sunday school or the Club. This was accepted as success by commentators and colleagues alike. Jay's success at maintaining numbers of members in

the Club and the congregation, for instance, was interpreted as a triumph for class reconciliation and for Christianity. His method, evolved in response to a specific situation, was considered by many to be the solution to breaking down the barriers that existed between the working classes and the rest of society, and particularly between them and the Church. The comment of the Reverend James Adderley, also a worker with the poor and a novelist, is representative of the accolade accorded to him by his contemporaries:

> ...Mr. Jay is doing wonderful work there, the sort of work which the charitable public imagines can only be done by General Booth. The Men's Club is probably unique....Perhaps the testimony of the police that 'many of the organized gangs of thieves have been broken up' is the best that can be given to the reality and usefulness of Mr. Jay's work.13

Despite the apparent solidity of this record, Jay was painfully aware of its frailty:

> It may be but a little thing which brings the impression, the sneer on some ribald lip, the laughter from some senseless mouth, the gleam of hatred from some cunning eye, but it is hard to stand alone and refuse to acknowledge that you feel yourself overcome. (SS 31)

His honesty is borne out by the conclusions of Charles Booth's religious survey, carried out in the late nineties and part of the extended survey of London life that Labour and Life of the People had become. Booth had already visited and described some of the Boundary Street area, as it was officially known, when doing research for the Poverty Series. (LLP1 94-101, under the pseudonym 'Summer Gardens') It is clear that his later research deeply saddened him, as he found full confirmation of the long accepted premise that

the Church of England was the religion of the middle classes, and that between the working classes and Christian denominations in general there seemed an unbridgeable chasm. The exceptions only proved the rule. He referred to Jay's 'famous club' and the story of the Old Nichol which 'has been told, and over told'. He acknowledged that Jay's sincerity and wholeheartedness in trying to reach the submerged working classes, and the small band of poor people who formed a regular congregation. 'But this is clearly a tiny pinprick of light in almost total darkness'. Booth concluded:

> ...one is at times almost driven towards the conclusion that there must be something actually repellant to the people in the pretensions of religion or in the associations of Christian worship.14

Booth clearly saw no grounds for seeing Jay's ministry as a regenerative force.

Henry Walker's religious survey, East London, published in 1896 for the Religious Tract Society, is more positive. A more personal and small scale investigation than Booth's, it still retains a sense of objectivity. Walker records particularly that Jay's afternoon Sunday service included '...the largest gathering of costermongers, casuals, and 'out-o'-works' at any religious meeting of men in this part of London'.15 Clearly the statement is relative and perhaps he and Booth agreed as to facts, though not in the response to those facts.

Section 4

This then is a summary of the work Jay did in Shoreditch which was to catch the public imagination in his own time. What remains is to trace their treatment in the popular press which was largely responsible for establishing a conviction of Jay's success, and from which the construct of Jay - social myth and fictional model - emerged. Journalists were not slow to recognise the value of the material Jay's work offered. They created for the public a contemporary figurehead, a man capable of turning the 'abyss' of London into the Kingdom of God. The simplest circumstances of his ministry lent themselves to Christological analogy. He had arrived in Shoreditch, a densely populated, wretchedly neglected area of East London at Christmas, having taken 'up the burden of being Vicar of Holy Trinity, Shoreditch.'16 He had had nowhere to stay himself, and had soon found that the only available building for communal worship was a hayloft over a stable. He lived in a frugal style in the parish and was available at all times to a community with more than its fair share of criminal behaviour.

Publicity for his parish was first set in motion by Jay himself with his appeal for funds to build a new Church.17 But it was Frederick Greenwood's article in The Daily Telegraph of 1887 which first selected and wrote up the aspects of his ministry that were to re-echo through numerous articles for the next ten years. Under the

pseudonyms, 'One of a Crowd' and 'The Amateur Casual', Greenwood wrote many articles about slum areas in London. On October 1st, 1887, he had written about Shoreditch in 'London Fever Nests', pointing out, as vigorously as Sims and Mearns before him, the immediate horrors for the individuals suffering from a variety of diseases, but also the threat to London's health in general if these diseases were allowed to spread.18 He followed this up on October 22nd with his account of Father Jay's work.19 No doubt the close juxtaposition of the articles went some way to creating a sympathetic and responsive support for a priest who offered some answer to readers' fears.

Greenwood's article stresses three aspects. As Sims and others did before him, he took up the role of adventurer to stress the extraordinary nature of the place he was visiting, and the descriptions employ an already familiar rhetoric. The path to Jay's Club is:

> ...close set with narrow ways which after dark are not lit at all, but are as the gaping jaws of ravening monsters ready for the reception of the victims whose hard fate it may be to be lured to their lairs.

and the Club itself is one of a:

> ...dreadful nest of little houses, haunted by robbers, who prowl the adjacent broad highway at midnight, seeking whom they may devour, inveigling their captured prey to their dens...

The 'facts' of Shoreditch conditions had accrued an air of horrible mystery to flaunt in front of a horrified public, giving terrible and specific substance to this rhetoric.

The contrast between the outside streets and the inside

of the Club is then highlighted. The Club is first introduced as if it is a fairy cavern, available only to those who know the exact spot and the ritual required to enter it. Once inside, it is its normality and its civilised atmosphere which are stressed - a place both part of and separate from its context. Greenwood writes in detail about the running of the club, listing all the facilities, rules, its history and its members' reponses. Among these facts are mentioned the boxing ring, the freedom to smoke, and the upstairs church. He also singles out two anecdotes about thefts from the Club. One in particular, about the theft and return of bagatelle balls, is amusingly expanded.

Thirdly, Greenwood stresses Jay's own role:

> How indefatigably the reverend gentleman must have been working, and how excellent his system of management, is sufficiently shown by the fact that within the space of ten months he has brought about a complete revolution amongst his decidedly mixed community of club members.

Finally, Greenwood emphasises the appropriateness of Jay's method in its lack of religious indoctrination, the interchange between Club members and congregation and its informality. The article is long and loses no opportunity to make entertaining reading, but its purpose is fundamentally serious. The facts and observations offered ring true, and the specific situation in Shoreditch is broadened to include other slum areas and the general plight of the poor and unemployed. Greenwood expresses enthusiasm and belief in Jay's effectiveness, but always within the context of well-informed, investigative journalism.

Another article about Jay published eight years later in The New Budget entitled 'The English Barbarian. His Haunts, His Habits and His Heroes' shows the shift that has taken place in describing his work.20 During those years, two of Jay's books had been published gaining him even wider publicity and making the details of his ministry more generally available. The article is noteworthy for being couched almost entirely in the past tense, as if the problems of Shoreditch are now a thing of history to be considered as a curiosity. What is being described is a completed and successful mission. The descriptions of Shoreditch as 'one vast sea of iniquity' and 'a hotbed of vice and crime' where 'Scenes of immorality were rampant' sound secondhand. Much of the longer descriptions attributed to conversations with Jay in fact read like extracts from Life in Darkest London

The substance of the article expands in anecdotal style the more unusual features of Jay's work picked out by Greenwood. The episode of the theft of the bagatelle balls is swollen into a short story of 600 words, where the power and charisma of Jay is shown as bringing an inveterate criminal to heel. Interestingly, the anonymous writer of the article records that the offender was banned from the Club, something not mentioned by Jay in his own account nor by Greenwood. It is likely that this is a late addition intended to set the original story within more conventional notions of punishment. Further additions begin to build up a picture of Jay, not as a man who can allow other men to be

themselves, but who is himself one of the men. We are told not only that there is a 'fully-equipped boxing-ring' but that 'The reverend gentleman himself often dons the gloves'. On Sundays the men are allowed to smoke since 'It is a free-and-easy arrangement'. The accompanying photographs - of the boxing ring, gymnastic equipment juxtaposed with one of the altar - point to the same message.

Tales of a boxing priest and a smoking congregation were presumably exciting for their novelty while being at the same time reassuring for showing that the working classes were being 'reached'. These tales became apocryphal. Jay claimed never to have boxed himself nor even to know much about the sport, but the 'boxing priest' he became.21 Similarly he claimed that his congregations rarely availed themselves of the right to smoke but the image of the 'smoking congregation' has survived even to the present day in Chaim Bermant's modern account of London's East End.22

In this article we see the beginning of a process to reclaim secular activity for the realm of spiritual triumph. Firstly, Jay's personality is made the pivot to which facts and social commentary are subordinated. Much of the account is ostensibly the writing up of an informal conversation with Jay, where his down to earth pragmatism is emphasised. However, a second strand of the article also portrays him as a supreme controller, whose unique qualities had transformed 'A spot which has been reckoned a very hell on earth...into a Christian Church'. How far Jay sanctioned this inflated interpretation, it is impossible to say. It was certainly,

in a sense, what he and others desired, - not eschatological prophecy, now fossilised and irrelevant, where men struggled from corrupted London to certain salvation, but the Kingdom of God created by transformed social relationships in temporal London now. However, the use of metaphor here has the opposite effect since it actually reverses the process of secularisation. While secularisation gives priority to people and their actions, the use of metaphor foregrounds the power of the institution.

An article written as late as 1898 by Arthur Mee, when Jay was about to vanish from the public eye into oblivion, makes the apotheosis complete.23 The first third of a long article entitled 'A Transformation in Slumland' belabours the horrors of Shoreditch as it was. It was 'a sink of iniquity without parallel in the whole of England', ' Civilisation ... had not reached 'Old Nichol' ...a decade ago'; 'Men, women and children died as of plague'.(My italics). Jay is interviewed as part of the article and the old familiar information about the Club, the bagatelle balls, the boxing and the Church over the stable is reiterated, but the emphasis on the personality of Jay has undergone a further stage of metamorphosis. His individuality is now subordinated to the abstract, the specific to the grand vision, and these examples of daily life are the manifestation of mystical power:

> What has happened that to-day Shoreditch commerce thrives, its population is respectable, its plague-stricken houses have disappeared, its thieves have departed or settled down either in respect or fear of the law? The County Council does not explain it. The law has not done it. Politics have not

> brought the change about.There is only one explanation of this wonderful transformation - it is the triumph of Christianity. (TTS 451)

Moving through metaphor towards parable Mee compares the power of Christianity to the growth of a mustard seed in the language of St. Matthew's Gospel. He goes on to parallel directly the growth of the Church with the diminution of misery. The introduction of electric lighting, the slum clearances and the consequent departure of some of Shoreditch's most depraved elements are all swept up into this metaphor as the article builds to its grand conclusion:

> Never in the history of religion has there been a more signal triumph of right over wrong ...the crusade begun in a hayloft is more truly representative of greatness and power than the Stock Exchange of every capital in Europe. From such little causes spring the great events. (TTS 454)

Here, the symbolic overlay of Christian discourse that Jay had done so much to jettison has been reconstructed to invest the parochial and secular base of Jay's ministry with an appropriate grandeur.

Section 5

The image of Jay, 'the Saviour of Shoreditch' was potent enough to inspire writers of contemporary fiction and draw it even closer to the reality they sought to capture. However, the process of transformation is different since the novelist is less tied to the specifics of facts, time and place. Journalists universalised Jay's localised,

marginal success by distracting the reader from those specifics and subsuming them into the symbolic. The novelist did not require such a strategy. The contemporary fascination with the slums, poverty and the secular forms of practical Christianity could be indulged. Any tension that arose between the writer's knowledge of the actual success of these approaches and their desire for that success could be resolved by the narrative. These texts become objects of desire in the same way as we have observed in the suburban novels of the same period. However, the strategy is less obvious since the context and substance of the narrative is rooted in well documented sociological material.The projection from present circumstances to future fulfilment also indicates some kinship with utopian novels, a relationship that will be discussed later. Jay's function was in providing the images of secularisation that could then be offered as models of success in secular terms but fictional context.

In The Redemption of Edward Strahan (1891), W.J. Dawson clearly drew on the Jay cult although as a whole the novel is a medley of literary traditions, mingling plot elements of the morality tale and the quest within a framework of social realism.24 The part of the novel immediately relevant to this discussion is concerned with Edward's stay in London. He goes to work with the 'worst' elements of the population in the 'worst' district of London, and his missionary activities are channelled through a warehouse which he transforms into a gymnasium. The incident that ties

it specifically to Jay is Edward's recounting of the bagatelle ball incident, changed in the novel to billiard balls. Traditional religious elements are strong in both plot and characterisation with London being presented as a purgatory where Edward is doomed to expiate his sins. Ultimately then the success of these activities is measured by Edward's own redemption rather than by their effectiveness with the working classes. Here the Jay material is little more than a convenient means of establishing a realistic sense of secular religious activity in London as a background to the novel's spiritual concerns.

Identification with Jay is taken further in the character of John Storm, the hysterical hero of Hall Caine's The Christian published in 1897. Hall Caine had written a biography of Jay, so would have been familiar with his work and may well have met him, but even so the lack of sincerity and the moral ambiguity of this novel brands it as a band wagon imitation of a social problem novel.25 Among the motley images drawn togther to give authenticity to John Storm's somewhat belated discovery that we need to 'apply Christianity to the life of our own time' is a men's leisure club where games and social activities are carried out in the mode of Jay.26

A more developed portrait occurs in A Princess of the Gutter by L.T. Meade.27 Very similar in approach to the slum novels of the early eighties, it was not, in fact, published until 1895. Here Jay is barely disguised as Father Moore. The heroine, Joan Prinsep, having unexpectedly inherited a

fortune but also a social obligation takes herself off to the East End where she carries out her philanthropic intentions under his guidance. The fictional heroine carries out to the letter the advice of the historical Father Jay, and the glamour of the achievement and success is restated in feminine terms.

The factual background of Jay's ministry is transferred unchanged to the novel. Father Moore has worked ten years in Shoreditch, an area where the death rate is four times higher than that of London, an area without Church or social facilities other than pubs, and with 8000 parishioners. The reader is told of the founding of a Men's Club - the payment of a penny, the ban on religious or political discussions, the insistence on good manners and respect. Joan, like her mentor, rejects the artificial life of West End amusement and church-going to live and work with her 'East End Sisters.' A physical description is not developed but the charisma of Father Moore is, as L.T. Meade describes how his very presence conveys power, urgency and authority leavened with sympathy and courage. 'His face was full of energy. He had dark eyes, which seemed to glow with a sort of inward fire...'28 Also consistent with Jay's contempt for half-hearted philanthropic action is Father Moore's demand that Joan choose between her old life and her new life. It is only when faced with his apparently impossible demands that Joan finds herself able to throw off doubts and fears and commit herself totally to the poor. Father Moore rejects her money if it is given without herself and demands, 'If you

give at all, give everything'.29 Joan tells the reader that 'His strong soul bore me upwards on wings like an eagle', and in a moment of vision she sees in him the potentiality of every soul in Shoreditch.

Important as Father Moore is as a spiritual mentor, the weight of the novel revolves around the narrative of Joan's experiences, the experiences of a well-bred, well-educated woman, in the East End. In A Child of the Jago, Jay's persona Father Sturt, is not simply the moral fulcrum of the novel. His frequent, brief, but always significant appearances, form a synchronic counterpoint to the diachronic nature of the many fragmentary narratives that make up the sense of the life of the 'Jago' - Morrison's pseudonym for the Old Nichol. Sturt has, in fact, a triple function. He has his own narrative - told directly by the author - of his struggles and his practices in the Jago. These are drawn directly from historical data and cover the now familiar facts. He also participates at many points of the other narratives - ordering, suggesting, alleviating, comforting. Most significantly, his physical presence, or even more magically his name, become emblems into which all his moral weight is gathered. His appearance on the scene is sufficient to maintain order. Of Dicky, in his most desperate moment, it is said, 'All he feared now was to meet Father Sturt'.30 To the Jago inhabitants he seems omnipotent. The authority and Titan-like power with which he strides through the novel intensify and hallow the Jay myth while remaining closest to Jay's own desire for the

community of the parish and the care of the parish priest.

Yet Morrison's fidelity to his material highlights the paradox at the centre of the novel. The difference of approach to referential material was one of the fundamental differences noted earlier between Besant's and Gissing's treatment of the working classes in the early eighties, and it emerges again in a comparison between Morrison's work and that of Meade, Dawson and Caine. Morrison had intended to write a novel about the London poor for some time. After a visit to Shoreditch on Jay's invitation he decided to research Shoreditch as a location. The two men worked closely on the factual background of the novel. Morrison accompanied Jay on his parish visits and parish records were made available to him. After publication Jay showed his approval of Morrison's version when he defended him against accusations of plagiarism and sensationalism,31, as earlier he had had to defend himself against similar accusations from George Gissing.32 Morrison also had personal experience of the East End to inform his fiction since he had been born and brought up there although the exact details of his early life are obscure.

Morrison grew to like and respect Jay, claiming in his Preface to A Child of the Jago that he wished '... to show that Father Jay's method is the only one that is possible to employ in such a district' and dedicating the novel to him. 33 In the text of A Child of the Jago he used the figure of Father Sturt as a central informing force and not simply as an alternative voice. The narrative's statement of his power

and the characters' apparent recognition of it to some extent sets up false expectations for the reader. As Wells points out in his review of A Child of the Jago, the narrative logic of the text works against its surface.34 Dicky Perrott is the character in whom the potential is most obvious and whose fate Morrison traces most thoroughly. Yet despite his intelligence, his determination not to sink into the Jago horrors and his respect for Father Sturt, he dies at the end of the novel defeated by external circumstances set up by Jago life. In attempting to maintain a realism that is both truthful to the secular role of Father Sturt and to the environmental effects of the Jago, Morrison disguises but does not resolve the paradox between the desired ends of secular Christianity and the determining force of social structures.

Section 6

In fictionalised accounts of his work and in novels designed to promote contemporary versions of Christianity, Jay's ministry was an unqualified success. In historical terms, we can see that he offered no way forward for the poor working classes. His individualism, his parochial philosophy seem, not enlightened but reactionary and his reasoning at times obtuse. The path he chose did, in fact, turn out to be a cul-de-sac. However attractive his ideas appeared during the volatile eighties and early nineties,

their power was rapidly ousted. His books were difficult to obtain by 1898, and with the turn of the century it became clear that attitudes to social problems were evolving along very different, more political lines. Perhaps such an assessment is severe on a man whose commitment, humour and compassion clearly gained the respect and support of his difficult parishioners, and contributed to the important debate on social responsibility. Perhaps Jay's dedication to 'parochialism' did indeed denote the lack of vision that the derogatory weight of that word implies and that he was never quite able to remove despite his positive affirmation of it. (SS 2-3) Chaim Bernant sums him up in London's East End this way: 'If Jay had a fault it was his excessive faith in churches...'35

Jay's personal effort and the radical nature of his approach are unquestioned, but his 'success' was specific and localised. Ironically, this is an assessment he would have understood and valued as he '...desired to localize, and therefore strengthen, the influence (of his work)'. (LDL 33) By attempting to forge a new voice of individual humanism from an unspoken Christian doctrinal foundation, it is easy to see why he appeared at the time a secular messiah, a revolutionary divested of danger, a peaceful resolver of the Old Law and the New, an affirmation of man's control over social forces. He was seen as appropriate for that period because whether he was viewed as an 'eccentric', 'undenominational' (Mee), 'unique' (Adderley) or 'remarkable' (Walker), his apolitical stand made him safe,

so that conscience stricken Victorians could applaud his courage and entertain a Utopian vision of regenerated London.

If Jay had not existed one feels that it would have been socially necessary to invent him in order to fulfil the expectations already set up by philanthropic debate, journalistic outrage, and political expedience. In a sense, this was the process that took place. Jay was more exciting than fiction because he existed, but he needed fiction to give him the effectiveness his parochial vision denied him. Through contemporary fictions he became the resolver of paradox. He could harrow hell and restore its inmates to their rightful position, yet his mode of action was secular and benign, so that in the contemporary imagination he was able to become that most inspiring of figures, a man capable of turning the 'abyss' of London into the Kingdom of God. It is only as a myth that he can survive today, a larger than life figure that stalks the streets of an imagined East End world.

Section 7

Stewart Headlam's commitment to the idea of secular Christianity was inspired by a different set of influences from his contemporary, Jay. He encountered the most significant of these influences when, as a young man appointed to his first curacy in Drury Lane, he had met F.D.

Maurice, one of the co-founders of Christian Socialism. Kenneth Leach in his account of Headlam's life and work notes how:

> In particular, Maurice's insistence on the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Humanity through the Eternal Sonship of Christ came as an immense liberating experience to Headlam. 36

This personally felt truth about the existence of the Family of Man, drawn from the symbolic expression of the mystery of the Trinity stayed with Headlam all his life, although he was to move considerably further than the early Christian Socialists in insisting on the political implications of this idea for Christians, and more specifically on their concern for the working classes. Even so he always continued to value the work of the early Christian Socialists since it had been their theological insight '...which made possible the formation of a soundly based Christian Socialism'.37

Headlam found his niche in the Church and his vocation when he founded the Guild of St. Matthew in 1877 and turned his efforts towards the formulation and implementation of late nineteenth century Christian Socialism. The Guild of St. Matthew's rapidly became a meeting point of priests and committed laymen who shared a conviction of the crucial nature of the Church's social role. It was through the Guild that Headlam met those Church contemporaries who were to become notable as advocates of a Socialist identity for the Church of England, men like the Reverend Percy Dearmer, the Reverend Thomas Hancock, the Reverend Conrad Noel and Canon Shuttleworth. Although the Guild did not include a political

statement in its aims, much less a Socialist statement, it was as Socialists that its members defined themselves. As we shall see, the perceived need to take up the challenge of Secularism and the perceived social implications of the Incarnation and Holy Communion fused into a doctrinal base for Socialist activism. In its 'at once intensely religious and intensely political' ethos Headlam began to write the series of sermons and pamphlets in which he developed his theology.38

There were also other influential forces at work. At the end of the seventies the Secularists, under the leadership of Charles Bradlaugh were at their most militant, thriving on the inactivity of the institutionalised Church. The humanist thrust of their philosophy, and of other atheist groups such as the Positivists, appeared to Christians to borrow Christian ethics without the informing inspiration and responsibility of Christian doctrine. This divorce of ethical practice and religious faith was attributed to the failure of the Church, rather than to the wickedness of individuals. Headlam himself strongly supported this view which was why he could see Bradlaugh as a seeker after truth, and in 'Socialism and Religion' argue that '...taking pains to see that the people were properly clothed, fed and housed...' was good in the eyes of God, whether or not they were labelled Atheists by others.39 The strength of the Secularists was to be short-lived, but the challenge they presented at this time in foregrounding the concerns of society over ritual expressions of spiritual

concerns went some way towards putting political activism on the religious map.

Other Socialist theories were also in the air. Headlam enthusiastically supported those outlined by Henry George in his Progress and Poverty and helped to fund and organise a series of lectures during his first visit in England in 1884.40 He was helped by H.H. Champion, although as a member of the Social Democratic Federation, he was uneasy with the individualism of Progress and Poverty, and more in harmony with Marxist collectivism. However, it was a feature of Socialist groupings in the eighties that ideological boundaries were not always rigidly drawn. George's theories provided a stepping stone for many people to test out their positions more clearly. According to George Bernard Shaw, another leading voice in the Socialist debate at this time who later drew on elements of Headlam's character for his portrayal of Morell in Candida:

> I was bitten by Henry George about the same time that Headlam was.... But I went on from Henry George to Karl Marx. Headlam stayed where I had begun...41

Although Shaw accepted Marxist analysis, he left the Social Democratic Foundation which was Marx' strongest exponent but which he found uncongenial and joined the Fabians. In fact, Headlam (and many other Christians) did join Shaw as a Fabian in 1886 and served on the Executive Committee from 1890-91, but his religious convictions made their theoretical and scientific approach to Socialism uncomfortable for him and he remained loyal to the moral and individualistic base of George's arguments. As he argued in

The Socialists' Church (1907) he felt that some Socialists had exalted Socialism into a form of religion and had mistakenly assumed it be a reasoned and complete philosophy of life.42

Headlam investigated these various political and religious groupings as he developed his own idiosyncratic theology. He was a great espouser of causes and as every bit a self-publicist for his ends as Jay was. He scandalised many with his entertainment of actresses; by setting up the Church and Stage Guild in 1879 and by preaching the funeral service for Alfred Linnell, an unemployed man killed by the police during a demonstration in the turbulent year of 1887. There were times, though, when he was severely tested for his convictions such as when he stood bail for Oscar Wilde before his second trial in 1895:

> Being a socialist and an unorthodox Christian, he knew that he would suffer notoriety for his kind action, and worse, be thought to have sought it. His maid left his service, some of his friends defected, and an enemy accused him of wading in Gomorrah on his way to building Jerusalem.43

Also like Jay, Headlam appears by instinct to have been an individualist, but unlike Jay, was convinced by the arguments of collective bargaining and collective provision. Bettany records in his biography a conversation with a parish priest in South London and quotes Headlam as countering parochialism by saying, 'You cannot save Vauxhall...without saving all London'.44 On the other hand, he was well aware of the dangers of forgetting the specific for the general and he stressed that:

> It was wrong...to use big phrases whether religious or socialistic, about God's Kingdom coming, or about the universal brotherhood, or about the complete emancipation of the workers from the tyranny of the capitalist and the landlord, unless it was realized that a common saved, or a playground made...by means of the united action of the parishioners and maintained out of the common purse, were partial realizations of the ideas which the big phrases conveyed.45

As his optimism for the immediate establishment of Socialist society waned, his politically active life became identified with such specific issues. Education became his chief concern, and he served continuously on the London County Council Schools Commission from its inception in the early 1990s until his death, with only a short break between 1904-07.

Section 8

Steward Headlam's broad social and political sympathies were strongly grounded in Christian doctrine. Speaking to a different audience and in a different context from Jay, his political arguments were always tightly tied to gospel or doctrinal sources. However, his fundamental aim was the same - to unravel Christian thought from centuries of institutionalisation and rediscover its original inspiration. At the heart of his theology were the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Atonement. The Incarnation was perceived as fusing the highest spiritual level with the lowest secular level, and therefore establishing the unique

value of human existence. The Atonement was perceived as the consolidation of unity and harmony achieved by Christ's crucifixion which was a demonstration of selfless love. Such explanations were not controversial but Headlam stressed the worldly rather than the spiritual aspect in what later came to be referred to as his 'sacramental social theology'.

It is at this point that Headlam's approach becomes interesting in its need to recreate Christian discourse if this 'worldly' aspect was to be fully expressed. The two doctrines he considered central to Christian thinking were expressed in Church ritual through the two sacraments - baptism and holy communion, or mass as it was called by the High Church. The sacraments were understood to be an outward sign of inward grace - an essentially symbolic act, not significant for themselves but for the invisible and spiritual truths they expressed. What had happened over centuries of Church practice was that the Sacraments had become public expressions of private faith; at best individualistic points of communication with God or, at worst, mere public show. In these two sacraments he felt Christianity and Socialism were inextricably bound together. As he was to say later, '... our Sacramentalism with our Socialism...we are Socialists because we are Sacramentarians'.46

When Headlam was first struggling to formulate and articulate this sacramental social theology, he concentrated on two aspects. The first was the secularisation of ideas. One of his earliest published collections of sermons, The

Service of Humanity, explored this approach in the conventional mode of Christian exegesis. The title sermon was preached on Maundy Thursday in Westminster Abbey in 1881. He took as his text Christ's washing of the disciples' feet and developed the idea of secular works as important to spiritual life. Similarly, he referred frequently to Christ as 'the Carpenter' to stress his link with the labouring classes. The word 'secular' was also reiterated as a marker of the central idea but possibly also as an attempt to reclaim it from the Secularists.

Headlam's second concern was to parallel the imperatives of Christianity with those of Socialism. As his ideas developed over the eighties and early nineties it is clear that he became increasingly convinced that Socialism was not simply a political ideology that best served Christianity's secular purpose, but that, read correctly, the gospels and doctrines of Christianity were Socialist texts. It is easy to see from the discussion of the sacraments of baptism and holy communion above how he reached this position. A worker Christ who emphasised equality, social responsibility and close social relationships above everything else could claim to be the father of Socialism.

From his earliest writings Headlam scattered Socialist terminology apparently indiscrimately among conventional Christian terminology. While this practice argues partly that in the early years he was emotionally but not intellectually clear about the connections, it is more

likely that he hoped to shock his audience into rethinking the issues by juxtaposing the two discourses; to familiarise them with new vocabulary; to remove the threat from what many felt was a provocative and potentially destructive revolutionary philosophy. The variety of terminology would be bewildering if it were not accepted as being largely interchangeable: communism, communists, commune, communistic, socialism, socialists, socialistic, scientific socialists, Christian socialists, Christian democracy, democracy, are used with frequency and vigour.

However, it is probably not helpful to demand too much precision since it is Headlam's attempt to draw contemporary socialist ideas into Christian discourse that is the important issue rather than than the fitting of Christianity into the subtleties of political definitions. Within this collected series of sermons Headlam could state with confidence that '... the Christian Church is distinctly and essentially democratic...',(SH 124), '... the Church is the true Commune...'(SH 72) and that '...it is a Socialistic Carpenter whom you are worshipping...' (SH 13)

Section 9

In 1884, Headlam published The Laws of Eternal Life: Being Studies in the Church Catechism. It was to be his most systematic attempt to give a contemporary expression of Christianity a Socialist vocabulary. His aim was to root the

theories of Socialism into Christian theology and to articulate them in a new 'mixed discourse', and in so doing to unite the spiritual and secular sides of man's nature. At the same time, he was trying to combat the dualism set up by religion and propagated by social structures in the divisions of wealth and class. Since he took the major aspects of the catechism step by step, moving through the Creed, the Sacraments, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, The Laws of Eternal Life is repetitive to read and the arguments inconsistent. However, there are two main threads. The first is the historical Jesus, who was a worker, a revolutionary, a rejector of the oppression of nations, of women, the weak and the sick, a lover of human kind. All Christ's words, actions, parables and the subsequent doctrines built on them by the Church are measured against and interpreted through this secular reality. The second thread is the theological substructure. The acceptance of Christ's humanity confirms the Incarnation as proclaiming the uniqueness of man, and the class and time in which he entered history indicates the values he wished to propagate.

The detailed paralleling of Christian and Socialist thought often exposes conflicts which are disguised in the passionate, more generally argued sermons. The secularisation of such doctrines as the Ascension, the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection is not convincing and the reader senses Headlam straining without success to break away from the traditional symbolic interpretations. For instance of the Virgin Birth he writes rather weakly:

> Every conception, as the Nicene creed teaches us, is 'by the Holy Ghost', and that which was exceptional about the birth of Jesus will probably seem quite natural to those who have learnt by their loyalty to Him, who and what He really is....(LEL 11).

The Laws of Eternal Life was written at the high point of the Guild's membership and when Headlam was full of confidence for the future of the Church and its role in society. In it he established a minimal vocabulary for the fusion of Christianity and Socialism: Baptism > Democracy; Incarnation > Equality; Holy Communion > Brotherhood; Sacramentalism > Socialism; Church > Commune; Spiritual > Secular. These words echo like a drumbeat through all his writings, reaching their greatest clarity of exposition in The Socialists' Church in 1907. Bettany's comment that:

> When he had discovered the right words for his thoughts he was not afraid of repeating them, he did not go hunting about for synonyms.47

probably misrepresents Headlam's educative purpose in working out the ideas of Christianity for his contemporaries through a fresh, provocative and relevant vocabulary. An insistence on a core vocabulary was very likely to be memorable. Reading his writings today one has the sense of a potential Christian revolution but not of a social revolution. In 1918 - ten years after the publication of The Socialist's Church - Headlam himself admitted that:

> ...we have not succeeded in inducing Labour and Socialism to make of the Church a Brotherhood, and use it as a great reforming instrument.48

Headlam's theological achievement was negligible, though the

work of The Guild of St Matthew's would certainly have been one of the numerous ethical and Christian strands that influenced the growth of Socialism into the twentieth century and maintained its attachment to an ethical base.

Both Jay and Headlam in their very different approaches failed to find a secular language that would express Christian responses to poverty and social distress in a way that either made sense of a corresponding spiritual life or conveyed a potential for a realistic Christian society in contemporary London. The treatment of Jay in realistic fiction highlights the tension between the actual and the desired that writers felt the need to resolve, and points to a special propaganda role for fiction. Headlam's theology lacked Jay's powerful experiential base to demonstrate its effectiveness. Neither man found a satisfactory form or language for containing both secular and spiritual perspectives on society and individuals. In the next chapter I shall examine some of the attempts novelists made to achieve this.

NOTES

1. The Reverend Arthur Osborne Jay was only one of many priests well known for their dedicated and successful work among the poor in the London slums. See Joseph Clayton, Father Dolling. A Memoir (London, 1902), and William Lax, Lax of Poplar: The Sory of A Wonderful Quarter of a Century (London, 1927).
The Reverend Stewart Headlam was one of a group of like minded priests such the Rev. Percy Dearmer, the Rev. John Clifford and Conrad Noel, some of whom were also members of the Fabian Society.

2. A.O. Jay. Life in Darkest London: a Hint to General Booth (London, 1891). pp. 5-6; p. 33; p. 83. Afterwards referred to in the text as LDL followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

3. A.O. Jay, Life in Darkest London contains a swingeing attack on Booth's sensationalism, superficiality and arrogance. See for e.g. p. 85-86; p. 137.

4. The East London Opinion for April 19th, 1941 reminded its readers that Jay was to be 83 years old the following Monday. Tributes occurred regularly in the press. See for example, the London City Mission Magazine, 'A Review of Work in the Nichol Street District, Shoreditch' (September 1894).

5. A.O. Jay, Life in Darkest London, (See note 2.); The Social problem: its Possible Solution (London, 1893), p. 36. Afterwards referred to in the text as SP followed by the page number. A Story of Shoreditch, being a sequel to 'Life in Darkest London' (London, 1896). Afterwards referred to in the text as SS followed by the page number. See List of Abbreviations.

6. See, for instance, Life in Darkest London, pp. 104ff.

7. Charles Booth, cited in Charles Booth's London: a Portrait of the Poor at the turn of the Century, drawn from his 'Life and Labour of the People in London', selected and edited by Albert Fried and Richard M. Elman (London, 1969), p. xv.

8. An illuminating example of A.O. Jay's political position is afforded by the Great Dock Strike of 1889. See his letter to The Times, 21 January 1891, p. 10 on his attitude to unionisation. For his dealings with the newly formed London County Council over slum clearance see A Story of Shoreditch, p. 12 ff.

9. For examples, see A.O. Jay, The Social Problem, Chapter 6; the Story of Shoreditch,p. 3, and Life in Darkest London, p. 28 and p. 131.

10. See The Times, 13 March 1891, p. 13.

11. Raphael Samuel, editor, East End Underworld, Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding (London, 1981), p. 19; p. 37.

12. A.O. Jay's visitation returns and abstracts of visitation returns for 1891, 1895, 1901 are held in Lambeth Palace Library, London. See also A Story of Shoreditch, pp. 12-43.

13. James Adderley, Looking Upward. Papers Introductory to the Study of Social Questions from a Religious Point of View (London, 1896), p. 17.

14. Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People. Third Series. Religious Influences, Volume 2 (London, 1902), p. 74. See also Vol. 7, p. 423 - '...the fact must be admitted that the great masses of the people remain apart from all forms of religious communion...'

15. Henry Walker, East London. Sketches of Christian Work and Workers (London, 1896), p. 96.

16. A.O. Jay quotes these words as part of the Bishop of London's invitation to him to accept the parish of Holy Trinity in The Times 14 January 1889, p. 13.

17. The Times, 25 November 1887, p. 6.

18. Frederick Greenwood, (pseud. One of a Crowd), 'London Fever Nests', Daily Telegraph, 1 October 1887, p. 2.

19. Frederick Greenwood (pseud. One of a Crowd), 'A Shoreditch Club', Daily Telegraph, 22 October 1887, p. 2.

20. An American in London, 'The English Barbarian, His Haunts, His Homes, His Habits and His Heroes', New Budget, 22 August 1895, pp. 28 - 29.

21. East London Opinion, 19 April 1941 refers to A.O. Jay as the 'boxing parson'. Arthur Harding also comments in East End Underworld: '...I think he [Jay] had been a boxer', p. 2.

22. Chaim Bernant, London's East End: Point of Arrival (New York, 1975), p. 180.

23. Arthur Mee, 'The Transformation in Slumland: the Remarkable Story of a London Clergyman' Temple Magazine, Vol. 2, pt. 181 (1893), pp. 449-54. Afterwards referred to in the text as TTS followed by the page number. see List of Abbreviations.
By this time, A.O. Jay's own works were out of print

while newspaper references to the specific progress of work at Holy Trinity had all but stopped.

24. W.J. Dawson, The Redemption of Edward Strahan(London, 1891).

25. Compiled by D. N., Father and Son: a study in heredity, Part 1, The Father: William James Jay. Part 2. The Son: A. O. Jay (London, 1914). Hall Caine contributed the second section to this biography of Jay and his father. The only remaining copy is held by the British Library but is bomb-damaged. However, the fact that Caine wrote the biography does make it very likely that he met Jay.

26. Hall Caine, The Christian: A Story (London, 1915), p. 266. First published in 1897.

27. L.T. Meade, A Princess of the Gutter (London, 1895).

28. L.T. Meade, A Princess of the Gutter, p. 86.

29. L.T. Meade. A Princess of the Gutter, p. 92.

30. Arthur Morrison, A Child of the Jago (Suffolk, 1969), p. 139. First published 1896.

31. See P.J. Keating, Introduction to A Child of the Jago, pp. 11 - 36 for brief biographical information and critical esssay.
C.R., 'The Methods of Mr. Morrison', Academy, 1284, 12 December 1896, p. 531.

32. See The Times, 22 January 1889, p. 10, and The Times, 11 September 1893, p. 3.

33. Arthur Morrison, Preface to the first edition of A Child of the Jago (London, 1896), p. 23.

34. H.G. Wells, 'A Slum Novel', Saturday Review, 82, 28 November 1896. p. 573.

35. Chaim Bernant, London's East End, p. 180.

36. Kenneth Leach, 'Stewart Headlam' in For Christ and the People. Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England between 1870 and 1930, edited by Maurice B. Reckitt (London, 1968), pp. 61-89, (p. 61).
For an account of Stewart Headlam's life and work by a contemporary, read F.G. Bettany, Stewart Headlam: A Biography (London, 1926).

37. Cited in Kenneth Leach, 'Stewart Headlam' in p. 70. Leach also gives a brief history of the aims and principles of The Guild of St Matthew.

38. Kenneth Leach, 'Stewart Headlam', p. 63.
The texts considered in this chapter are :
Stewart Headlam, The Service of Humanity and Other Sermons (London, 1882). Afterwards referred to in the text as SH followed by the page number.
Stewart Headlam, The Sure Foundation: An Address Given Before the Guild of St Matthew at the Annual Meeting (London, 1883).
Stewart Headlam, The Laws of Eternal Life: Being Studies in the Church Catechism (London, 1884). Afterwards referred to in the text as LEL followed by the page number.
Stewart Headlam, The Socialist's Church, Labour Ideal Series (London, 1907).
Stewart Headlam, 'Christian Socialism' in Socialism and Religion,The Fabian Socialist Series, 1 (London, 1908), pp. 5-26. Essay first published 1892.
See List of Abbreviations.

39. Stewart Headlam, 'Christian Socialism', p. 9.

40. Henry George, Progress and Poverty (London, 1882). First published in America 1879-80.

41. Cited in F.G. Bettany, Stewart Headlam p. 138.
In an imaginary interview with himself in The New Budget, 4 April 1895, Shaw wrote, 'I have chosen a type which, so far as I know, has not yet been taken seriously on the stage. I mean the Christian Socialist, the member of the Guild of St Matthew, the regenerator of the Church of England. In short, the man who would be found working with Canon Shuttleworth...and the Reverend Stewart Headlam'.

42. Stewart Headlam, The Socialist's Church, p. 48; p. 67.

43. Richard Ellman, Oscar Wilde (London, 1988), p. 438.

44. Cited in F.G. Bettany, Stewart Headlam, p. 137.

45. F.G. Bettany, Stewart Headlam, p. 75.

46. Church Reformer, IX, No.11, (November 1890), p. 244.

47. F.G. Bettany, Stewart Headlam, p. 229.

48. F.G. Bettany, Stewart Headlam, p. 144.

CHAPTER SIX

LONDON AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD: REDEMPTION IN THE THE NOVELS OF MRS HUMPHR Y WARD, WJ DAWSON, JAMES ADDERLEY AND ROBERT BUCHANAN

1888 - 1898

Section 1

> Among the clergy and ministers of the left - whether they were radical by temperament, or slum-pastors moved by the poverty of their people, or evangelists bridging the gulf between themselves and the working man - the social gospel reached its Victorian culmination about 1891, 1892, 1893...

wrote Owen Chadwick in his examination of the process of secularisation in the nineteenth century.1 A group of novels emerged during the late eighties and early nineties that became crucial texts in the realisation of this social gospel. Their popularity and influence were widely acknowledged in their own time by theologians and critics alike, although opinions as to their value differed widely.

In some ways these novels form an uncomfortable grouping, but several important common features can be identified. They all foregrounded issues of the relevance of Christianity to working class concerns. They all saw the perceived threats of Secularism and Atheism as due to the

failure of the Church to reach this social group and counter-attacked by fashioning secular versions of Christianity. The narratives seek resolution of the spiritual/secular dilemma by universalising from the experiences of a powerful hero-figure. They were all seen as contributions to the contemporary debate, that is, the texts were used as evidence in theological dispute or as theological texts in their own right. Finally, they were all set in London, the focus and embodiment of contemporary religious and class conflict.

These features not only identify these novels as a group but distinguish them from the mid-century 'Condition of the People' novels. The arena of religious debate had shifted radically from the Christian Socialist novels of Charles Kingsley. Alton Locke (1850) and The Water Babies (1863) explored and exposed social injustices, but their themes were of social mediation. Similarly the theological ground had shifted to the '...vital and influential...religious and romantic' Catholic movement of the Church of England and its impact on London, as exemplified by Father Jay, Father Dolling and others.2

In her survey of the Victorian religious novel, Margaret Maison categorises these novels as 'social helpfulness novels' regardless of when they were written.3 However, this does not offer a sufficiently accurate description of the novels of the nineties. It is true that they were rooted in a didactic tradition, but they had moved far from their original source of inspiration - to acquaint society with

the social injustices around them. They were able to build on the growth of public awareness and the new willingness to change that had developed during the seventies and eighties. They shared a sense that social bonds were crumbling and that amelioration was no longer sufficient. They saw themselves as iconoclastic, disposing of the old and erecting new systems and structures which would revolutionise the moral life of society. For these reasons I consider 'social redemption novels' to be a *more appropriate* description for this group.

Four novels have been selected from this group for closer discussion. They each throw light in different ways on how Christian discourse was used in fiction in an attempt to secularise and socialise it. The first is Mrs Humphr y Ward's Robert Elsmere (1888).4 Margaret Maison does not include this novel in her survey since its subject is loss of faith. However, this is to misunderstand the relationship of this novel to Christian ideas and its role in illuminating how Christian discourse was modified and transformed in the process of secularisation. The second, W.J. Dawson's The Redemption of Edward Strahan (1891), draws on traditional conventions of moral didacticism and slum realism but uses them as a framework for exploring more contemporary questions.5 The third is the Reverend James Adderley's Stephen Remarx (1893) which finds a fictional form for the Christian Socialist perspective disseminated by the Guild of St Matthew.6 I shall conclude with a discussion of Robert Buchanan's The Revere nd Annabel Lee (1898) which

constructs a counterpointing scientific utopia where Christianity re-emerges as the religion which sanctifies pain and suffering.7

A recognition of the particular interest of these novels will come in part from our understanding of the relationship of these novels to the Victorian reading public. Attention has been drawn to this earlier in relation to realism and the work of Walter Besant and George Gissing. It is also a dimension anticipated by the discussion of the role of fictionalising in the construction of the Jay myth. Novelists began to use their fictions, either wholly or partly, not only to explore social issues but to be specific instruments of influence within them. The latter part of the century revealed a conviction, for better or worse, that the religious novel was a public force in a new and potent way. Straightforward didacticism, 'influencing children in the ways in which they should think and act for the rest of their lives' gave way to a more radical intention to influence the structures themselves by engaging the awareness of the individual.8 Writers concerned themselves with the instability of contemporary theology and morality, and saw their novels as restatements of them.

Their popularity, and the popularity of the religious novel in general, seems at first a strange phenomenon in the face of frequent claims about the extent of religious apathy. Silas Hocking, himself a popular and prolific writer of religious novels in the 1890s, commented in an essay on Christianity and the working classes:

> It is not the problem novel, or the novel of doubtful morality that is most in vogue. The widest circle of readers is for the novel with the religious tendency.9

Novels appeared to be attractive as secular alternatives to the gospels, bridging the gap between abstruse theological controversy and the personal need for an expression of faith. They individualised religious opinion and freed people from sectarian priests. No doubt they fed, as well grew out of, the desire for the secularisation of religion. Perhaps most importantly the novel was able to offer a version of that intersecting point where science, politics and religion crossed in a succession of hypotheses concerning the nature of man, God and society. Priests as well as writers chose fiction above the sermon, the debate or the philosophical tract as a more pervasive, immediate and appropriate form of religious instruction. In the words of one priest/critic :

> It sometimes seems as though the man who has fresh light to throw upon the problems of theology will be compelled to write a novel to get himself listened to.10

A novel such as Stephen Remarx became 'a text book of the younger generation'.11 Ruth Ellis, an earnest chapel-goer at the turn of the century, recorded in her diary the excitement of going to hear Silas Hocking preach in London.12 Priest and novelists appeared to have exchanged or at least blurred their traditional roles.

This alteration in the relationship between fictional, theological or related texts and reader response became a subject for debate between priests and literary critics. A

note of bewilderment can still be heard in the comment made by the priest turned novel writer, James Adderley, as he described ten years later in his autobiography how he took up writing:

> The curious thing is that modern philosophers are telling us now that our best chance of getting a hearing is to preach fiction as if it were fact, and moreover that, if we do it persistently, the fiction becomes a fact, and the only kind of fact that religion has got to offer.13

It also points to a specific role for fiction already noted - that it had the power to present fiction as fact, to imply the universal from the specific and to present a desired outcome as a realistic now.

E.M. Chapman expressed a similar concern in his survey of literature and religion. He feared the distortion and subversion of religious ideas through sensational, populist treatment, and cited Hall Caine's The Christian (1897) as an example of a novel which goes for the 'shudder of a day'.14 However he felt the distortion produced by a novel such as Mrs Humphr y Ward's Robert Elsmere was more disturbing. The hero figure, Robert Elsmere, was a newly ordained priest. The crucial factor of his development was the collapse of 'feeling' which substantiated the daily fact of his mystical faith when challenged by scientific rationalism, and his struggle to make sense of a moral existence outside the Church. The novel caused considerable controversy at the time and popular opinion rapidly established it as a cult. Critical opinion followed suit but with a different emphasis; it treated Robert Elsmere as a theological tract

and the argument raged over points of theology, while it was largely ignored or dismissed as a work of literature. With hindsight E.M. Chapman remarked that Robert Elsmere demanded this non-literary response because the hero's loss of faith was directly related within the text to actual biblical, theological and scientific works and extracts, which presented 'impregnable premisses and invincible arguments' before which Robert's faith crumbled. Of such a novel he sardonically claimed:

> ...one has a right to ask that the libraries of fiction in which these [impregnable premisses and invincible arguments] are contained should be catalogued - at least in an appendix.15

Chapman's point is an interesting one. It is not sufficient to argue that Mrs Ward exercised the writer's right to select and that Robert's intellectual world is a fictional construct intended to convey the nature of the dilemma. She invested such referential weight in the arguments Robert rehearses with himself and others that the series of intersecting contemporary ideas that constitute Robert Elsmere's spiritual dilemma - that is, his 'character' - become detached, forming a separate body of knowledge within the text while the name 'Robert Elsmere' maintains the role of Robert as a valid fictional creation. Within the moral framework of religious novels, the text of Robert Elsmere could be said to deceive. By masquerading as fiction, it avoids the necessity for logical substantiation. By quoting and referring, it claims the authority of an academic work.

In responding to the public's desire for new answers, religion was being drawn into an alien mode of production.

> Thus it comes to pass that theology in our day has been recoined in the mint of literature, and reissued for circulation with the stamp of a brand-new image and superscription.16

These religious novels, then, became, like the suburban novels which were being written during the same period, objects produced by a particular cultural need. They used realism as a device to root the narrative in the context of religion, poverty and the working classes but, in fact, offered utopias as the narrative outcome. In doing this they satisfied what Josef Altholz has called in his study of The Mind and Art of Victorian England, 'the warfare of conscience with theology' that beleaguered Christians in the new climate of thought.17

Section 2

In the social redemption novels London became the means of synthesising three groups of ideas: those connected with the division between theology and the individual conscience, with the relationship between secularisation and the working classes, and with the dichotomy between spiritual and material matters. London was made the centre of these controversies and a striking number of novelists located their narratives in it. The city that appeared to defy description or analysis offered an appropriate scale of size

and complexity to explore the battle for philosophical coherence. By deconstructing images of London in this group of novels the paradox implicit in the fictionalising process of the Jay myth can be revealed fully. On the one hand we find a strikingly contemporary metaphor for the incompatibility of the spiritual and material in Christianity but, on the other, a reconstructed metaphorical network for the Christian doctrines of Baptism, Atonement and Redemption.

The range of ideas and issues with which it is associated is confusingly wide. However, a reading of London in the religious novels falls into two broad categories. The first is concerned with London as an arena within which new experiences can be encountered and investigated, that is as the appropriate location for the growth of a new, and in this case specifically secular, religious expression. This thematic approach initially accepts the novel's purpose and the relationship of writer to reader as outlined above. Here the references to London form a basis for a realistic portrayal of the city and also act as signposts, as in the slum novels, to the burning issues of the day. The second is concerned with how these realistic images of slum London function within the novels. Here we are brought up against questions of form and technique. In particular, it highlights how the novelists adapted the realistic and didactic traditions they drew on in an attempt to express as effectively as possible the new ideas. Of necessity, the separation is partly artificial. Finally, the discussions

overlap and merge as the novels emerge as particular kind of texts - a hybrid of social and religious artefacts.

London is rarely the sole location in the religious novels. It is more usually counterpointed against a remote or rural location, as the Isle of Man in The Christian, Westmoreland in Robert Elsmere and Middleham in The Redemption of Edward Strahan. In narrative terms the move to London is a conscious choice marking a dramatic change in the protagonists' lives. This change may be perceived as positive or negative; in both cases London is seen as the appropriate context for their new lives. Often the choice is made without knowledge of the city but informed by the image the city carries. So Robert Elsmere chooses London as the obvious city for him to move to after his resignation from the ministry because it can provide a fitting context for the development of a secular morality and of social usefulness. Mark Rutherford in Autobiography and Deliverance was the precursor of this model, seeing the move to London as crucial to validating a secular theology in a time of personal spiritual crisis. Edward Strahan chooses London when he feels crushed by the weight of his sin because its size will provide the anonymity he craves and because he will be accepted in a city of apostates.

The London that is most strongly associated with this spiritual condition is the East End and the poor, unemployed or working classes. However, in contrast to the early slum novels there is little description of people, places or conditions. A referential framework is set up through the

mention of well known areas or streets or buildings which maintains a sense of realism. In fact, these references are often so slight and undeveloped that they appear to rely either on the still vigorous and familiar tradition of slum realism or, more generally, on the common knowledge of a situation that had informed public debate and a variety of reading matter that had constantly aired the subject. With London's 'reality' a given factor, the concentration is rather on London's symbolic significance, which is variously economic, moral, spiritual and political, or a medley of all these four. On other occasions there is pre-eminence of the selective process that was identified in parts of George Gissing's Workers in the Dawn and Thyrza and Margaret Harkness' Out of Work. Images of London are used as an objective correlative to show the interaction of environment and consciousness.

The fusion of the reality of London and its significance as a spiritual experience underpins the sense that London is the most intense version of reality available to contemporary experience. Living in London is the Christ experience in that it involves living with the lowest levels of society and knowing them to be equals. Politically, London also provides a powerful democratic experience where the masses are recognised to comprise a number of unique individuals. London then becomes the dynamic meeting point of the flux that was, among other things, drawing Socialism and Christianity, politics and religion, into the same discourse.

A sense is conveyed in these novels that London - particularly slum London - is the key to an understanding of the contemporary world and a key to the resolution of its problems. Inextricably enmeshed with this idea is the identity and importance of the working classes. In these fictions, the nature of London's future is dependent upon the destiny of the working classes. Their response to the variety of political and religious viewpoints was seen to dictate the future of society. For most Tories, the answer lay in the propagation of traditional religious controls; for Liberals and some Tories, the increase of philanthropy with some State support. Liberal views argued for the increase of education and social amelioration; Socialists argued for revolution or, at least, radical change; Fabians called for reform through social evolution.

Mingling with these predominantly political ideas was the idea of London as Church. Since the secularisation of religion demanded the abandonment of Church edifices, churches were replaced by the streets and institutions of the city. The working classes were seen as the true body of the Church since they were the weak and exploited, and it was these people with whom Christ identified when he chose the role of a carpenter for his incarnation.

At this point London can be seen to have come a long way from a realistic city, the appropriate location for particular narratives, and has become part of the framework for a Christian symbolism that attempts to hold in balance the spiritual, the secular and the political. The utopias of

the religious novels are imposed on realistic material in much the same way as Walter Besant creates the Palace of Delight in All Sorts and Conditions of Men, and there is considerable evidence that the writers and readers saw these utopias too as realistic possibilities. The New Brotherhood, the humanist organisation founded by Robert Elsmere in Mrs. Ward's novel became social reality when Passmore Edwards founded the Brotherhood under Mrs Ward's guidance. Similarly, the Order founded by Stephen Remarx became a real monastic order that lasted some twenty years, and to which for a time Adderley himself belonged.18 Images of Jay's working men's club that were incorporated into fiction must also be added as versions of utopia which Victorians accepted as fact.

This response grew partly from the spirit of a time which had appeared to accept that 'miracles do not happen' but had, in fact, simply secularised the concept into the kingdom of now.19 Marxism had an eschatology of its own '...because it comes, must come, comes soon, cannot long delay'.20 When William Morris adopted Socialism, he believed that the advent of Socialism would be almost instantaneous. Stewart Headlam, as we have seen, was disillusioned when Christian Socialism had not transformed people's beliefs by the mid-1990s. His colleague, James Adderley, believed that the single event of the Great Dock Strike of 1889 would capture the Unions for the Church.

Section 3

Robert Elsmere (1888) is the earliest of the social redemption novels which I want to discuss. I shall deal only with the final book 'The Brotherhood of Man' when London becomes the location. Robert chooses to move to London at the point of the narrative when his rejection of the supernatural in Christianity is complete intellectually and emotionally, but before he has experienced what that might mean in terms of his daily existence. The earlier locations in the novel, Westmoreland and Surrey, have marked respectively the peace and harmony of the old, unquestioning faith, and the security and respectability of the institutionalised Church. With his role as the interpreter and purveyor of mysteries stripped from him, the only part of his ministry that retains meaning judged by the criteria of his newly formed rationalist philosophy is his work in the slum quarter of his former parish of Murewell. It is this meaning he fixes upon in reply to his wife's bewildered question - 'What next?', after he informs her that he will renounce orders.

> 'Shall we try London for a little?' he answered in a queer strained voice, leaning against the window...'I should find work among the poor - so would you ....(RE 374)

From that point London becomes the location of Robert's 'meaning', a city marked out as appropriate for a particular kind of religious experience. It appears to offer the potential to create significance and purpose in the face of loss of mystery. The city which was seen as an 'abyss' which

drew lost souls into her vortex is subsumed into Robert Elsmere's vision of a moral landscape where social realities offer him spiritual realisation, and where a metaphorical 'hell' can be transformed into a secular heaven.

For Robert, London's potential to compensate for spiritual loss lies precisely in her trenchant and demanding existence as a material reality. His rejection of mystical Christianity is not a rejection of Christ, much less of God' - '...after the crash,' we are told, 'faith emerged as strong as ever'. (RE 348) It is primarily the rejection of a mode of thought which apprehends the world and articulates itself through mystical symbols and parables. When Robert is able to accept that 'miracles do not happen' he is simultaneously accepting a materialist/rationalist standpoint. His peculiar dilemma is to reconcile a passionate theism with his newly acquired scientific materialism. The foundation of such a religion becomes 'Dirt, drains and Darwin'. (RE 170) In other words, the immediate amelioration of present suffering replaces an acceptance of it, and the biological destiny of human kind replaces its spiritual future. By analogy, the winning of heaven becomes the forging of social bonds and the Body of the Church becomes Robert's 'New Brotherhood'. As these symbolic allusions emerge, so the sense of a material London begins to fall away and the idea of the city begins to take on a quasi-sacramental force. It is the outward material reality that promises a new inward growth. Yet this realisation emphasises the symbolic at the expense of the

material reality of London which, thematically, is so important.

This imbalance is set up by Mrs Ward's treatment of London. The name, a talisman to Robert at the point of decision, remains a talisman for the reader, a grouping of contemporary meanings reinterpreted through Robert's vision. Although London's concreteness is implied as being an objective correlative of Robert's rationalist philosophy, Mrs Ward does not construct it convincingly. In contrast to the full and detailed descriptions of Westmoreland and Surrey, Mrs Ward reduces the world of London to the minimum of references necessary to establish an environmental context. It is introduced, predictably, as 'foggy and gloomy', an 'Inferno', and the reader is reminded of 'its murky poisoned atmosphere...' Brief references to such symbolic and familiar monuments as Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's complete the list of fragmentary pointers to the real world.

W.S. Peterson in Victorian Heretic tells us that Mrs Ward was unhappy about the London section, and spent some time in London to familiarise herself with the East End in particular.21 This information supports the view that 'London' carried a peculiar significance. It also raises questions as to her intentions in falling back on vestigial traces of what had by 1888 become cliches. The most likely explanation seems to be that words such as fog, gloomy, warehouse, Inferno, set against St Paul's and Westminster Abbey were judged as sufficient to indicate to readers a

wider, more detailed portrait of an area, its structures and activities and, more important, to remind them of its contemporary state of spiritual alienation and apathy. This would be consistent with her use earlier in the novel of the Book of Daniel and the Book of Genesis to indicate the contemporary struggles of Robert's intellectual milieu. London's appropriateness and significance appears to be assumed and, therefore, indicated only by shared passwords. In this way, Mrs Ward tried to overcome the dilemma of representing London realistically - which was necessary for substantiating Robert's emphasis on a secular world - while freeing herself from the material specificity of descriptions of poverty and ugliness which would inhibit the suggestion of the city's changed spiritual state.

The usual weight of a realistic novel is diminished as the lack of description places London even more firmly as the nexus of a symbolic rather than a realistic framework. Much of this is, of course, lost to the modern reader. Without an understanding of the external reference the novel draws upon, it could appear to offer only a complex hotchpotch of impressions intersecting spiritual, ethical and material worlds which are embodied in layerings of personal, public and political significance. Consequently, a discussion of Robert Elsmere inevitably crosses the boundary between history and fiction in an attempt to reconstitute the 'emblems' that, in the novel, provide the focal points for contemporary ideas and issues. Mrs Ward's reliance on referential support made the creation of realism incomplete

and ambiguous. Much of the significance suggested by the word 'London' and its associated images in Robert Elsmere is shared with the slum novels. It is interesting to ask how much of the knowledge that the reader was expected to bring to the text was, in fact, earlier literature become 'fact'. 22

A further, more complex element of the London emblem is the working classes. If London is the conceptual arena, the working classes are the conceptual centre. Finding out, knowing and being accepted by the working classes takes on an almost mystical significance akin to finding the Holy Grail. They represented a complete otherness which held the answer to contemporary dilemmas. Robert Elsmere is on a quest and the completion of it, he makes clear, lies largely in the hands of the working classes. With democracy lies Robert Elsmere's present hope and future reality. Walking in London soon after his arrival he contemplates the beauty of Westminster Abbey against the sunset. He then turns his back on that institutional Church taking the meaning of it while rejecting its form:

> Carrying the poetry and grandeur of England's past with him, he turned his face east-ward to the great new-made London on the other side of St. Paul's, the London of the democracy, of the nineteenth century and of the future. (RE 412)

The working out of this conviction is the weakest part of the novel. Mrs Ward cannot continue to use those emblems that point to contemporary London beyond Robert's first visit to the East End, if she is to suggest a material change. However, she appears to lack the vision to

materialise 'the great new-made London' in other terms.

Mrs Ward's portrayal of the working classes is only a cipher, unable to bear the weight of the significance invested in them. They remain an amorphous mass, detached from the spiritual and intellectual drama which remains Robert's alone. His talk on 'The Claim of Jesus on Modern Life' illustrates this point. It is a crucial moment in the novel for it is this speech which inspires and unites his audience and leads directly to the foundation of the New Brotherhood, Robert's new religion. After a brief introductory description of the variety of people in the hall - akin in function to the earlier brief descriptions of London - the tension of the speech is built up by a series of depersonalised suggestions of a reacting audience. 'There was a stir of feet', 'a score of pipes...went down (RE 493), 'The room grew absolutely still' (RE 494), 'The room hung on his words...' (RE 494), and, finally, 'The audience woke up from the trance in which it had been held...(RE 499) At the point of the novel where democracy supposedly begins, there is never any doubt that this is reaction, not interaction, and that the expression Robert finds is merely the articulation of his own thoughts.

The 'reconceiving of Christianity' never moves beyond a system of ideas, is never realised by Mrs Ward. A spurious technique of realism that used literary formulae to suggest sociological and political realities is displaced by the narrative to leave merely an aura of realism over a sequence of events that has become more akin to a fairy tale. London

and the working classes, the materialist parallel of Robert's rationalist philosophy dissolve, leaving only bald assertions of a new spiritual meaning, of a new society, such as the paragraph which draws the novel to a close indicates:

> The New Brotherhood still exists, and grows. There are many who imagined that as it had been raised out of the earth by Elsmere's genius, so it would sink with him. Not so! He would have fought the struggle to victory with surpassing force, with a brilliancy and rapidity none after him could rival. But the struggle was not his. His effort was but a fraction of the effort of the race. In that effort, and in the Divine force behind it, is our trust, as was his. (RE 604)

The stated force of Robert's success is, however, only accepted through a predictable appeal to feeling. In the same way that the reader was required to bring certain information with which to contextualise the narrative, so s/he is required to transcend paradox through emotional response. That appeal was entirely successful. Robert Elsmere ran to numerous editions, - its status as 'realism' confirmed by the foundation of the Passmore Edwards Settlement.

It could be argued that the final section of Robert Elsmere has a different significance. With the loss of orthodox faith, Robert simultaneously loses an organic and coherent world-view. The fragmentation of London could be read now as a move towards creating a new form of consciousness, where the central dramas are internal and the external world filtered through an isolated ego. In this context Mrs Ward would be anticipating the kind of

alienation explored in an early modernist novel such as A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) where a dream of the future can only be validated as a personal construct. But this it seems to me is not her intention. Robert is firmly conceived as having moved from artificial divisions into a perception of the world where society and man's intellectual and spiritual needs cohere. The New Brotherhood is identified with his race not against it and his unique individuality contextualised by social and Divine forces.

Section 4

In The Redemption of Edward Strahan (1891) W.J. Dawson is more successful in avoiding the sense of utopia that invades realism when the intended thematic and aesthetic fusion of materialism and spirituality breaks down. This is not so much because he finds an answer to this problem but more because in the treatment of his theme he belongs to the earlier slum novel tradition and is more cautious in dispensing with the conventions of the realistic novels. By keeping Edward Strahan as the single major focus of experience, and the spiritual development as his internal growth, he limits the range of the novel and its social applicability but heightens the illusion of its realism.

The novel traces the spiritual journey of Edward Strahan from the rigid Methodism of the provinces through the

available contemporary philosophies to an individually forged expression of Christian faith. Fundamental to his search, as to Robert's, is the need to throw off institutionalised religion and fossilised dogma. The consequent recognition of the inadequacy of possible substitutes yet of the need for moral activity and meaning culminates in a faith that satisfies Edward's own needs and resolves his spiritual, social and intellectual dilemmas. Initially, his reasons for choosing London are very different from Robert Elsmere's, although for him too it is an unknown world. He chooses it as a morally tolerant and neutral area where he can hide his shame for the sexual immorality that drove him from his home. He sees London as a place where judgement is meted out but according to an irrational and unique criterion of human worth, rather than by an immutable system of eternal laws:

> London throws one swift glance on a newcomer, discovers what marketable talent he possesses - if, indeed, he has any - offers him his price, and if he disputes the justice of the verdict, contemptuously pushes him aside, and cries, 'Next'. (RES 42)

This is the impersonal London of Mark Rutherford, a terrifying, obliterating force that is, because of this, a fit receptacle for apostates and sinners.

W.J. Dawson describes London in great detail, particularly when Edward first arrives. The familiarity of these descriptions is counterbalanced by their appropriateness for Edward's fear, his sense of smallness, and above all newness to such scenes. (RES 36)

His first journey through London is charted with detailed

realism: (RES 39) Strahan's responses to this environment of gloom, depression and loneliness are predictable too. Gradually, however, he internalises these images of London which then emerge as questions about the quality and purpose of life not only for himself but for the poor and the oppressed. From this point Dawson's treatment of London begins to be more subtle. There is a sense of interaction between environment and consciousness that moves Strahan towards that material reality which is the London experience and which embodies the potential for spiritual reality already suggested in Robert Elsmere. As Strahan more clearly formulates questions and seeks answers, so his perception of London is more selective and more analytical.

At each stage it is London that both raises the questions and provides the answers, as we see in the chapter 'The History of a Sunday'. Having attended a church service only to hear a sermon about the irreparable nature of sin, Strahan is filled with despair. Later an atheist friend tells him. 'Human kindness is the only form of religion we want' (RES 112) and he begins to consider the possibility of a moral code outside the Church. His view is confirmed by the fact of the Church buildings:

> Blind and black they (churches) rose out of the unquiet night, and they seemed fit incarnations of the unseeing stupidity of the world that calls itself religious. (RES 114)

His attention is then caught by a series of images. A Salvation Army girl is counterpointed by the priest whom he heard preach of 'the irreparable nature of sin'. '"They believe in Hope and Brotherhood"' Strahan tells himself.

(RES 117) The capture of a wretched criminal unnoticed by a band of drunken revellers outside a brilliantly lit pub indicates, despite religious effort, the ugliness and desperation of human activity. Trafalgar Square where Nelson and the homeless are juxtaposed, the prostitute whose apparent corruption conceals kindliness and strength is passed unseen by the Radical M.P. Mr Mardstone, 'the People's Tribune', whose intellectual convictions remain detached from his immediate perceptions. The fragments of these and other images shape Strahan's consciousness and animate an independent, newly discovered moral and spiritual self. He begins to understand that what seemed the moral neutrality of London is, in fact, the catalyst for the moral and spiritual life of the new age. The revelation he receives of the humanity of God and the divinity of man occurs in a moment of insight induced by the louring ugliness yet massive grandeur of an industrial canal side at London Pool.

Dawson's portrayal of the working classes is integrated organically into these kaleidescopic images. Invested with no preconceived significance, they are competently realised both in a series of vignettes and in individual characterisation. The rapid movement from image to image creates the sense of a living, moving mass while the family Strahan lodges with provides a close-up of the effect of social conditions on their lives and attitudes. Alice's rejection of Christ, her bitterness and heartlessness, are directly related to her gradual subjugation by the sweated

labour system she is embroiled in. Her mother dies in abject poverty, her wages stopped at the onset of illness after a lifetime's work. Grace, crippled through malnutrition, sees only one room throughout her short life. Different members of the family emerge into the spotlight of the narrative at different times, expressing ideas which Strahan is compelled to consider and resolve. Through the novel they provide a continuum which roots Strahan, the outsider, more authentically in communication with the class he is learning about. This helps to make Strahan's final decision to live among the working classes in the East End more acceptable, more psychologically realistic.

Edward now begins to understand the multi-faceted nature of the reality London offers. The carousel of answers he encounters only satisfies or arouses him temporarily by catching him up in a spurious sense of change, but his identification with 'the intense desire for reality which makes the Londoner despise the parson' (RES 114), drives him on. He finally fuses his spiritual need for mortification and purification by deciding that:

> 'I will then go to the worst part of London I can find, and live there...The thief, the harlot, and the loafer are the persons I want to get hold of'. (RES 209)

The implication is that the heart of personal, moral and social truths lies with the lowest common denominator of the urban mass, the outcasts of London society housed in London slums. Their existence is Strahan's personal salvation and his mission to them expresses the contemporary need for a secular role - a moral purpose generated outside traditional

religious institutions and marginalising revolutionary, even radical, political activity. With Strahan's move to Shoreditch, the London scene coheres again into an appropriately realistic setting for his mission; a portrayal that clearly draws on Father Jay's account of his work at Holy Trinity, Shoreditch.

Dawson's greater success at realising a spiritual struggle in the materialist terms of London topography and inhabitants does not disguise the fact that Edward Strahan is a less interesting novel than Robert Elsmere. Its emphasis on an individual's spiritual journey and that individual's rejection of all answers other than Christianity makes Edward Strahan, despite his rejection of the Church and his demand for a personalised religion, more akin to an urban missionary of the 1880s. It is interesting that Christian Socialism is also rejected within the terms of the novel since at the time Dawson was writing it was the most vigorous and potent expression of practical Christianity. How consciously this is an aesthetic rather than an ideological rejection is hard to assess. There is no doubt that by creating a personalised system of beliefs out of Edward's immediate experiences of London, Dawson retains a coherent structure for the novel and credibility for his theme. On the other hand by referring to, examining and contextualising ideas current in the London of the early 1990s and yet rejecting them, he effectively marginalises Edward's response into a personal rather than a social salvation. This dislocates the novel's apparently immediate relevance to the contemporary debate. In 1905 Dawson wrote:

> The religious novel proper is that which centres itself expressly, definitely, and by distinct limitation on the exposition of religious ideas or the statement of theological problems...23

In The Redemption of Edward Strahan he opted for that limitation. It gives the novel coherence but fossilises it for a modern reader for whom ideas of sin and redemption are shadowy if not entirely lost .

Section 5

Similar processes are seen at work in a very different novel, Stephen Remarx, written by the Christian Socialist and Fabian priest the Reverend James Adderley, and published in 1893. The novel revolves around the relationship of religion to class and economic conditions. These ideas are explored through the activities of the symbolically named Stephen Remarx, a newly ordained priest who dedicates his life to changing the moral awareness of the middle and upper classes in order to change the lot of the poor. This change of emphasis frees Adderley from the necessity of recreating the East End, but increases his dependence on reader pre-knowledge. Adderley took advantage of this curious closeness of fact and fiction with aplomb, and abdicated almost entirely the role of realism to the activity of the reader.

This straddling of reader supplied-fact and author-supplied fiction was probably attempted because of Adderley's naivety as a novel writer. He was slightly

bemused by the huge success of Stephen Remarx which he had written during a few weeks holiday, and attributed it to:

> ...the simple fact that it dealt with a subject which was in everybody's mind at the time.24

He commented how, in retrospect, he could see that he was part of a movement that temporarily established the novel as the arena of religious significance. Adderley was himself a vigorous and dedicated Christian, prepared to absorb the blows of challenge and change. He was able to accept this strange collaboration of reader and writer, the blurring of fact and fiction and the shifting of doctrine from authority to imagination and even to be amused by it. In a later novel, Paul Mercer (1899), he makes one character refer to his earlier fictional character Stephen Remarx as an historical character who had greatly influenced social opinion.

As we have seen, this attitude clearly marked another stage not in the weakening but in the secularisation of Christian thought as well as investing the novelists of the time with a heightened consciousness of their role as thinkers for society. It is within this context that Stephen Remarx needs to be read. What intensified this sense of Stephen Remarx having a social role is that the theory embodied in the text was not a projected hope as in Robert Elsmere nor a contemporary idea explored through individual experience as in The Redemption of Edward Strahan. It was the exposition of an actual theory, Marxism, that had directly or indirectly begun to influence the Church's

attitude and the tenor that working class politics were increasingly to adopt. Adderley set out to popularise a small but growing school of thought.

Like Mrs Ward, Adderley never describes the London so crucial to his narrative. London as an urban context is suggested by the simplest of referential signs: Hoxton, Chelsea, the University Settlement, The Embankment are among the very few. For Adderley,the places themselves - that is, a realistic recreation of them - are less important than their accumulated meanings of social significance. The juxtaposition of Hoxton and Chelsea, for instance, describes the social distances of class, of economy and political status and the qualitative differences of spiritual alienation from apathy to institutionalised respectability. The novel stands realism on its head, and makes not the places but the concepts the locations of the actions - concepts, however, generated and focused by the external reality of London which again emerges as the catalyst for social change and religious restatement. Adderley's use of place names hangs uncomfortably between the realistic reference, the symbolic and a rather crude attempt to show the determining and defining power of urban structures.

The marriage of Christianity with a specific material ideology such as Marxism was easier to accept through feeling than to articulate logically, as Headlam's attempts in his theological works had revealed. The ideological tensions could not be resolved through a common discourse. In wishing to represent the reality of contemporary London

and the state of mind it induced in its inhabitants in order to reveal the Socialist nature of evolved Christianity in action and to create a pervasive sense of the transforming power of spiritual values, Adderley set himself a task of some literary complexity. Christianity sought to explain the nature of Man and God and so lent itself naturally to the use of symbols. Good and evil, the visible and the invisible, the mortal and the eternal were a series of dualisms through which Christian men and women had always interpreted their actions and motives. Again this mode of thought lent itself to the building of metaphorical networks.

Marxism on the other hand sought to describe the nature of man and society, and the personality as the outcome of economic and social structures. Although Socialism was not initially anti-Christian and Marx never advocated attacking Christianity, he felt that the dualism encouraged by religion was:

> ...the outward sign of the innate conflict between state and society. Far from being a spirit of brotherhood, it is the essence of social division.25

Through Stephen Remarx Adderley tried to create not only a personal reinterpretation of Christianity that could be passed on to others but the ideological hybrid directly promoted by the theology of the Guild of St Matthew. The text was to be a means of connection between two systems of ideas. Adderley was not the first to try to do this. In the startling The History of Joshua Davidson, published in 1872, Eliza Lynn Linton wrote a novel about Communism and

Christianity against a background of the Paris Commune of 1870-1, where she identified Communism as evolving from Christianity. But Adderley was the first to do so in the new climate of Socialist activity in England which triggered the foundation of the Social Democratic Federation in 1881, the Fabian Society in 1884 and various Christian Socialist groups, and made Socialism become again a lively contemporary issue. It was this wave of interest - when, as Adderley himself says:

> ...Socialism of a very mild type was beginning to be indulged in even by duchesses.26

that produced Stephen Remarx and established it as a contemporary favourite. Yet it is hard to take Adderley's Marxism seriously, for the evangelical is always dominant. The vestigial nature of the reality of London and its lack of conviction as an urban structure is a warning that Adderley's investigation of Socialism as a material philosophy will be correspondingly vestigial. It becomes unrecognisable as a Robin Hood type system of compensation from the upper classes to the lower classes founded on a moral awareness of Christ's teaching.

Louis J. Rataboul in his survey of priests in Victorian literature accepts the validity of Adderley's Socialist framework. He bases his discussion on Stephen's conscious cultivation of Trade Union leaders - almost his first question of his new rector is, 'I suppose you often have Tom Mann and Ben Tillett in here, don't you?' (SR 14), and his:

> ...rêve de sa vie en fondant une communauté religieuse qui s'engage à vivre dans l'"East-End" de Londres un communiste chrétien ou

> chacun renonce en toute liberté à posséder individuellement aucun argent et aucun bien.27

Clearly Adderley wanted to emphasise the Socialist aspects of the new Christian Socialism. The text is littered with references to economic theory and economic injustice envisaged in terms of the class struggle. John Oxenhan - a docker, a participant in the Dock Strike of 1889 - is the exponent of Socialist theory in the text. (SR 50) When John Oxenham's feelings are transformed by his contact with Stephen's philosophy of love, the systems fuse into one. Class struggle, alienation and conflict on the one hand and religious hypocrisy and indifference on the other wither away:

> They sat and conversed; the son of a peer and the son of a gardener, the parson and the Socialist: so separated according to the world's reckoning, but so close to each other in reality; men of one heart, of one aim, each desiring above all things to make this world of ours a better place,... each eager to be up and doing, each, yes, each of them a 'saint'... (SR 71)

It is interchanges such as these where Socialist ideas are absorbed into Christian terminology that continually weight the text. The effect is to undermine both materialism and secularisation to produce an accumulative effect of vague utopianism.

One example of a concept explored in particular detail in Stephen Remarx will illustrate the process of integration of Socialist and Christian language. The concept of alienation, inherited by Christianity from Judaism was then inherited by Marx. For Christians this was a spiritual

dislocation caused by people's alienation from their God through original sin. This was the source of unhappiness and the ills of society. Marx in Das Kapital used this concept to describe the results of a set of social relationships involving man, labour and production. Judaic/Christian discourse explained this alienation by the Fall of which the need to labour was seen as the outward sign. Return to harmony was ensured by the Crucifixion and the consequent Atonement. On the other hand, Marxists saw the organisation of that need to labour, i.e. capitalism, as the alienating factor. Man and his labour became alienated from each other. These divisions could only be healed by economic revolution.

Stephen Remarx attempted to suggest a new inclusive paradigm of man's sense of alienation. Adderley dropped the role of original sin, accepting capitalism as the outward sign of alienation between man, God, his society and his labour. However, the means of resolution which lay in human love is ludicrous in terms of Marxist ideology. Through his narrative and his hero, Adderley launches an appeal to feeling in his audience in which he implied that the ends of economic revolution could be achieved by an emotional revolution. This fiction could only be materialised by the shared conviction with his readers that he could 'preach fiction as if it were a fact' so that eventually 'the fiction became a fact'.

Although Stephen's mission is directed towards the rich and privileged in society, Adderley's failure to create any sense of working class mass is a profound weakness. Within

his skeletal symbolic London landscape only two working class men exist, each representative of types. One is the politicised dock worker and the other one of the 'submerged tenth' (called, rather unkindly, Mr Snivel!) Their frankly stereotypical treatment moves Stephen Remarx even further from realism and towards allegory. The introduction of Mr Snivel is the concluding incident in the novel. Here contemporary realism, contextualised by the location on Thames Embankment, Blackfriars Bridge and Paradise Terrace, and sociologically pinpointed by a reference to '...old Booth, who had a nightmare and thought he saw some poor devils out on the riverside' (SR 146), is swept up into Christian hagiography. The suggested symbolism in Stephen's name is made explicit by the chapter heading 'On the Feast of Stephen', his rescuing of the dying Mr Snivel and his handing over of his coat on a cold winter's night. He is finally killed by upper class revellers throwing snowballs who, quite clearly, 'know not what they do'. The final paragraph elevates Stephen to the position of Christian martyr. He dies quoting Stephen's words from the Acts of the Apostles. He is also

> Adderley lui-même; mais aussi Barnett, Headlam, Stanton, Stubbs, Shuttleworth, Hancock, et tous les pasteurs de l'Église d' Angleterre qui, vers la fin de siècle, toujours fidèles a l'ésprit de F.D. Maurice et de son message The Kingdom of Christ...[28]

Adderley uses Stephen's character as a meeting point of eternal truths and present exigencies to convey the sense of Christ unchanging and Christ realised anew; Christ from God

and Christ of the people.

Section 6

The appeal to feeling as a literary device to resolve the textual paradoxes of these novels was made the thematic target for Buchanan's attack in his novel The Reverend Annabel Lee (1898). He singled out the word 'Love' from the Christian vocabulary and explored its impact on individuals and their ability to create a stable society. The emotion that Robert Elsmere, Stephen Remarx and Edward Strahan claimed to be the common denominator between religious doctrine and social need and between the spirits of Christianity and Socialism is shown to be the very factor which made their mutual integration impossible.

Annabel Lee revealed the fundamental antipathy of Christian and materialist theories of society. Set in a future society where the processes of scientific materialism are all but completed, London has been established as the secular Kingdom of the God of Humanism. This progress has been achieved by scientific advances which have solved the problems created by a capitalist economic system and by a supersitition riddled religion, namely Christianity. Annabel Lee, beautiful, educated and sensitive, learns through the unexpected death of her young brother the existence of the last unsolved and apparently insoluble mystery. She steeps herself in the learning of the gospels amd emerges as a

latter day prophet, who wishes to reintroduce Christian ideas, particularly Christian love, into a city that has long discarded them.

It is not surprising that since Christianity's fictional triumph tended to be offered as a vague promise for the future, Buchanan chose to project his narrative out of the nineteenth century into the year 2020 to explore the reality of this promise. In this future society the tangled threads of contemporary theories have been separated out and time has revealed their real value and the extent of their influence. Because he saw the dangers of integration and, indeed, thought Christian doctrines inimical to social health and happiness, Buchanan had no constraining need to invoke the realism attempted by writers such as Adderley as a vindication of Christianity's secular relevance. The novel is a fantasy, a dystopic vision which launched a vitriolic attack upon Christian apologetics.

In Annabel Lee, the roles of city and country are reversed. London, the city of the future, is an embodiment of rationalism. Through rationalism urban potential has at last been released into structures that both promote and reflect human happiness. The city's physical presence is no longer assertive as it was in its ugliness and filth, but diffused with a sense of ordered beauty where nature appears in her most benign form organised by the rationale of the city it served. It emerges as very similar to Frederic Harrison's Positivist utopian London suggested in The Meaning of History and lyrically formulated in 'Ideal

London', where 'the silver Thames' wound its way through 'lovely cloisters' and 'venerable buildings' that suggest man's dignity and corporate nature, although Buchanan, in fact, ridiculed Positivist ideas.29 As a contemporary topographical reality London has vanished completely to be superseded by an urban vision focused by its reference to actual London, though more frequently referred to as the 'Great City'. Parallel to the development of urban beauty is the evolution of human health and beauty. This is partly attributed to the improvement in urban conditions, partly to the elimination of disease and deformity because of medical progress and partly to genetic control. The fatally weak or the congenitally malformed are not allowed to reproduce and those who have nothing to offer to society are eliminated. This last is seen as a temporary, preventive measure, but it is also an aspect of Buchanan's utopia that most forcibly anticipates Aldous Huxley's satire on just such a society only fifty years later.

Human relationships within this utopia reveal a step in evolution that has effectively made obsolete Marxism, reformist Socialism and Christian Socialist dreams. The progress of science has simply made economic and social theories redundant by establishing living conditions through which personal happiness and fulfilment become norms. Concepts such as justice, equality, and capital exist as part of the logic of human happiness rather than of the inherent conflicts of dialectical materialism or of morality. 'The only straight-forward and truth-telling force

at present at work is modern Science' Buchanan claimed, and in Annabel Lee Buchanan invested it with a force he did not in fact perceive it to have in his own time where '...it is not sufficiently aggressive in the social sphere to be of much avail'.30

The ideological dynamism that animates this city was drawn from Herbert Spencer's optimistic interpretation of Darwin's theory of evolution:

> Instead of the militant type characterising the struggle of Nations as well as of individuals for existence, the industrial type triumphs. Life becomes less painful and more beneficent, and the race grows nearer and nearer to a state of ultimate perfection. This is the belief of the profoundest thinker of the century [Spencer] and without daring to assert whether it is true or false...I still think that it is in its very essence a beautiful Dream.... 31

Buchanan sees this as a 'dream' but one consistent with a projection of reality unlike wild unsubstantiated eschatological hopes or secular religions. On these grounds, he celebrates Spencer's vision of the evolution of 'the altruistic spirit'.

The novel concludes with Annabel's return to London where evolved society is strong enough to tolerate, listen to but, finally, to judge the threat to it. The idea of Christianity on trial is not a new one in Buchanan's work. In his long poem, 'The Wandering Jew' (1893) Christ is arraigned for the same reasons as Annabel - the stirring up of human misery with false dreams. The specific term on trial is 'love' - the love that goes out to the weak and the suffering. Annabel and Uriel, the cripple who has become her

disciple, are tried for their intention to marry which demonstrates the possible social outcome of such a feeling as love. The trial centres around the conflict between the unquestionable benefits of scientific progress and the apparently ineradicable primitive emotions and needs of men and women. Into the 'Great City' where '...life ... had for some generations reached to such a pitch of decorous perfection ... that for many years no offence had been perpetrated.' (RAL 230), Uriel's and Annabel's union threatens to 'pollute the life-stream of...society'. (RAL 239) Faced with the individualistic expression of love and loyalty, atavistic emotions are released:

> ...the dwellers in the Great City were but men and women after all, with the original passions of love and pity hot in their hearts, a burning substratum under an icy veneer of culture and custom. (RAL 249)

The result of the uproar meant to support the defendants is Uriel's death by a violent blow and Annabel's ecstatic vision of his soul rising upward. Yet despite Annabel's 'victory' in personal, spiritual terms, it remains quite clear that her triumph is misguided. What Christianity can achieve through its doctrine of love can only be in the personal terms of an inner world and is a carefully preserved delusion. In the same way that Christians were appropriating the word 'Socialism' to mean what they wanted, so too the word 'love' was defined by its user and has no relation to the altruistic love necessary to establish a secure social foundation. It could, in fact, barely exist

within it since however crucial to personal needs such a love is, it remains anarchic and potentially destructive.

'It all amounts to this', wrote Buchanan to Noel Roden in 1894:

> ... a creed should be judged by its practical results, and Christianity has deluged the world with innocent blood purely owing to its loose terminology.32

By placing his novel in the future Buchanan felt able to separate the strands of meaning that had been artificially merged in ideas of society, Socialism and Christian compassion,and to portray fully the destructiveness of this outworn creed that in the 1890s was still inextricably woven into society's ideals and individuals' hopes:

> And the verdict of Humanity has veritably been the verdict that Buchanan has recorded. The wan and way-worn figure of Christ - 'Deathless, yet dead' - haunts the sad world, no living presence, but the shadowy wraith of a beautiful dream and a great lost purpose, feebly wandering towards final dissolution and oblivion.33

Section 7

The difficulty each writer found in realising the city that was central to their ideas, and the failure of each of their attempts to assert the material nature of the city in spiritual terms is ironic. Influential in their own time as secular texts, in fact they each promulgate the very ideas they wished to qualify. Robert Elsmere, despite its atheistic gloss, is steeped in Christian ethics which are

the mainspring of Robert's secular actions. The 'redemption' of Edward Strahan which the narrative introduces as a secular state of integration with society merely affirms the idea of good works as an entrance to salvation with his deathbed scene. Stephen Remarx, whose radical title boldly asserts a realisation of Christian Socialist doctrine, is a simplistic allegory about Christian mysticism. Despite their obvious contemporaneity, in every case the secular version never succeeds in replacing but only in symbolising established mystical truths.

A similar inversion invades the role of the working classes. This class which '...holds itself aloof ...from all existing spiritual agencies' (RE 472), becomes in itself the Body of the Church to replace '...the parson (who) is not practical' and 'the religion of the Churches (which) is not real...' (RES 114) In response Stephen Remarx abandons his pulpit in his empty church; Robert Elsmere leaves orders and founds a secular religion in the East End and Edward Strahan, a layman, founds his community in Shoreditch. But in this context, the working classes become the contemporary equivalents to the outcasts and workers of the gospels - Mary Magdalen, the prostitute; Peter, the worker and the Samaritan, the outsider. Humanitarian action designed to reanimate and regenerate the democratic community becomes an expression of spiritual power exercised to save individual souls.

The movement of these novels towards an allegorical or utopian form was probably compounded by the writers' own

habit of mind. Mrs Ward was not a Christian herself, nor was her protagonist, Robert Elsmere. Nevertheless she could not divest herself of the Christian heritage she had grown up with, although she could make rational statements and assertions about it. As W.H. Mallock pointed out in his review of Robert Elsmere in 'Amateur Christianity' she was capitalising on the teachings of Christianity while disputing their authority.35 For those writers who were Christians and who had a specific religious purpose in writing their novels, like Dawson and Adderley, a personal acceptance of metaphysical concepts appeared to increase the difficulties of achieving a convincing secular expression.

The synthesis of fact and fiction in these novels was popularly considered a desirable one, establishing a sense of truth through feeling and a happy resolving of intellectual and moral dilemmas. The evolution of Christian thought had already taken many to an independent realisation of the need for change. It had simultaneously moved through successive stages of secularisation to emphasise contemporary rather than eschatological realities, and social rather than institutional expression. Socialism was thought by many to provide the language for that daily reality, but as practical Christians drew on its source to explain and enrich their vision of reality, whether in novels or in social and theological tracts, its own material definitiveness became leavened with metaphor. The social and economic concepts embodied in terms such as brotherhood, communism and socialism were transmuted into metaphysical

terms which underpinned a moral landscape into which material facts such as 'labour', 'property' and 'capital' were transplanted. The fictional realisations of this semantic marriage into an experientially and aesthetically unsubstantiated discourse, compounded the theological and political confusions of the time. As Stephen Mayor concludes in The Church and the Labour Movement:

> It is difficult to attempt any summing-up of the relationship of religion to the progress of Socialism during this period [the 1890s] because of the repeated failure of all parties to the debate to define what they meant by the term.35

As has been shown these novels deal with the confusion by transcending it for utopian worlds. One of their most potent attractions for their reading public may well have been an aspect for which they were so often criticised - that they were able to leap the obstacles of ideology and definition and were able to make what were frequently spurious syntheses of contraries by selecting aspects of the argument calculated to arouse sympathetic feeling. However, inconsistent and flawed as they are as realistic novels, they focus on an important moment of flux in the struggle between spiritual and material conceptions of the world. They suggested a more comprehensive paradigm of the cause and resolution of man's sense of alienation. They did not pinpoint a moment of progress for Christianity, but rather a growing plurality of thought, facilitated by an increased public awareness of the languages of secularism and Socialism, through which the same phenomenon - the suffering of the working classes in slum London - could be described.

Notes

1. Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church (London, 1972), p. 279.

2 T.P. Stevens, Father Adderley (London, 1943), p. 84.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

LONDON AND SOCIALISM: POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE NOVELS OF MARGARET HARKNESS, CONSTANCE HOWELL AND CLEMENTINA BLACK, 1888 - 1894

> The hub of the Victorian empire, London had assembled representatives from scores of principalities and provinces beyond the seas, and it Anglicized non-Britishers by the thousands, enabling them to share ideas and impressions more readily than in any other place in the world.1

Among the thousands of foreigners drawn towards England and London during the 1880s were political exiles who used the comparative freedom to develop and consolidate their ideas and, in some cases, to prepare for new challenges to the countries from which they came. Notable among these figures was Peter Kropotkin who had been exiled from Russia for his Communist-Anarchist activities and who lived in London from 1886 until 1917 when he returned to Russia. During this time he exchanged ideas with leading British Socialists such as William Morris and Bernard Shaw, both of whom had considerable respect for his personality and some sympathy for his ideas. Similarly, Kropotkin's countryman Stepniak, who had fled from Russia in 1883 and was to stay in London until his accidental death in 1895, had close links with the growing Socialist movement.2 The most

influential of the foreign exiles was to be Karl Marx, whose historical method and economic theories as expressed in Das Kapital were to become the cornerstone of British Socialism. Marx died in 1883 before he had an opportunity to contribute actively to the pursuit of change in England. However, his ideas had been influencing revolutionary thought since the publication of The Communist Manifesto in 1848, and books such as W.H. Hyndman's The Historical Basis for Socialism in England (1883) and numerous pamphlets, had been making the ideas of Das Kapital available before its translation into English in 1887.

London was not only the chosen home of such political thinkers, but also the birth place of England's new wave of Socialism. Unlike earlier Socialist movements, the first rush of energy in the 1880s was confined almost totally to London. At the beginning of the century Robert Owen had concentrated his energies into the creation of a co-operative village in New Lanark in Scotland. Between 1838 and 1850 the Chartists had campaigned for suffrage in Manchester and other large northern industrial centres. Christian Socialism, inspired by F.D. Maurice, had emanated from Oxford. The Social Democratic Federation on the other hand was founded in London in 1881. Its splinter group, The Socialist League, and the Fabian Society were also founded in London in 1884. Members of the three groups travelled the length and breadth of England and Scotland lecturing, sometimes on invitation, sometimes not, with true missionary zeal. However, none of the groups ever established a

vigorous membership outside London, although they were responsible for laying the foundations for debate. The reasons for this are amply discussed in histories of Socialism and some aspects will be referred to later.3 The fact remained that 'It was chiefly a London movement - this social-democratic agitation of the eighties'.4

Each of these Socialist groups developed their own programmes and evolved their own distinct strategies for the furtherance of a Socialist society. Yet there was considerable interchange between their members and considerable common ground in their convictions. What Joseph Clayton in The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1884-1924 says of the Social Democratic Federation that it 'was a movement from a centre to the circumference' is arguably true of the other two groups. These groups all shared the 'centre' and the 'circumference' that Clayton refers to - that is, the ideas generated by Das Kapital, and London's existing political and social structures to which those ideas had to be applied.5

The activities of the men and women who organised these Socialist societies and who took up membership rapidly became a distinctive feature of London's political life. Their passionate determination to create a Socialist society was powerful enough to disseminate the new ideas more widely and to challenge existing ideas more profoundly than the sum of their numbers would suggest possible. The Social Democratic Federation published Justice and the Socialist League, Commonweal. The Fabian Society published numerous

pamphlets, either expositions of Socialist theory or discussions of social issues. These, of course, largely reached the converted or the interested intelligentsia.

More significant for identifying London as the stage of the new Socialism were the open air meetings and frequent demonstrations. These were larger and more provocative to Londoners' sense of security than any since the Bradlaugh Secularist rallies of the late 1870s. Although both Marx and Engels distinguished between what they called the 'lumpen proletariat' and the skilled working classes, the public imagination confused fears of an uprising of the 'barbarian hordes' and the objectives of Socialism. Many felt that the activities they were witnessing could fuel a dangerously revolutionary situation.

On 8 February 1886, property in the West End was violated for the first time by organised bands of the unemployed moving on from a demonstration in Trafalgar Square. It was one of the earliest of a series of demonstrations which were to dominate London during the next few years. Feeling ran so high that Parliament banned the use of Trafalgar Square for rallies, although it was later forced to rescind this rule.6 Police control was introduced and became increasingly brutal, culminating on 15 November 188 in 'Bloody Sunday' when three men died and over two hundred people were hospitalised. Inflated and exaggerated as fears of revolution probably were, the fact remained that the existence of a few vociferous Socialists did help to emphasise that the map of London was changing - not just

through the desperate actions of the very poor but through political will. Those who felt most threatened feared that the East was drawing nearer to the West, and that the sanctums of the upper classes and the Church, such as Park Lane and St Paul's Cathedral, were being taken over for organised class confrontation where madmen appeared ready to sanction mob violence.7

There is a further reason for associating Socialism specifically with the London scene of the 1880s. Although Marxism was not and did not include a programme of social reform, many reached a belief in Socialism through a sense of compassion and a desire for social justice rather than through an intellectual acceptance of Socialist ideology. Socialism very rapidly became, not simply the theory expounded by Marx and Engels but an umbrella term which encompassed many shades of opinion from the revolutionary, such as William Morris, to the committed Christian, such as the Reverend Stewart Headlam and the agnostic, such as Beatrice Webb. Many of those campaigning for change in social conditions allied themselves in one way or another to Socialism. The unique mix of Marxist, Christian and Trade Unionist strands that British Socialism was to become, was forged initially in response to London's particular needs.8

The Fabians played an important role in the familiarising of Socialist ideas. Their particular objective and achievement was the dissemination of Socialist ideas through local government structures. Very early in their existence, they had decided on political and constitutional

methods of reform as against insurrectionary or anarchistic methods. They then began to evolve the famous policy of Permeation, which brought Socialist thinking into every area of public planning from housing to education, from health to leisure as social legislation attempted to solve some of London's acutest problems.9

Section 2

The significance of these political issues was registered in fiction almost instantly by writers with very different viewpoints. W. H. Mallock's The Old Order Changes (1886) provides an interesting example of process in the fictionalising of real events. Gissing describes the same events in Demos (1885). Later, in 1888, Margaret Harkness' Out of Work described an unemployed rally in Trafalgar Square in a powerful evocation of working class helplessness in the face of state control. William Morris on the other hand, transformed the events of 'Bloody Sunday' into the catalyst for revolution in News From Nowhere (1890). The chapter 'How the Change Came' recreates the events of that day, coloured by Morris' realisation that revolution could only be achieved with a high level of organisation and political awareness at grass roots.

Many novelists who wrote about the activities and personalities of Socialists absorbed them in narratives where they were marginalised, stereotyped or vilified. W.H.

Mallock's portrait of W.H. Hyndman in The Old Order Changes is an extreme version of the latter. Early in the novel, Foreman (as Hyndman is named in the text) is proved a fool, out-argued on Marxist theory by the Roman Catholic priest Mr Stanley in front of an open minded, rational upper class audience which had invited him to join them at their houseparty in a French chateau to discuss his ideas. On his return to London, his stupidity is shown to be dangerous in his mad incitement of the masses:

> ...he was shouting to those around him like a/ maniac loose from Bedlam, and waving the red flag which he held....Meanwhile his eyes were starting out of his head; and his whole face was flickering with the livid gleam of insanity.10

Madness is a common thread. George Gissing's portrait of John Pether in Workers in the Dawn (1880) shows a man fanatical in his pursuit of the republican ideal. H.G. Wells, himself a Socialist, created in Kipps (1905) the pathetic Mr Masterman dying unfulfilled with the gleam of a zealot in his eye. Edna Lyall in We Two (1884), countering one prejudice of her day by reinforcing another, distinguished between the humanist rationality of the freethinker, Luke Raeburn the hero of her story, and the destructiveness of Socialism which:

> ...is the most foolish system on earth. Inevitably it turns to this sort of violence [the hotel set on fire] when the uneducated have seized on its main idea.11

In novels of the 1890s, when fears of civil unrest had waned, the Socialist more frequently emerges as a con man, an opportunist who rides on the bandwagon of misguided, if

sincere, Socialist ideas to persuade innocent young women into free union or to make a quick profit, as does Mr Wetherell in Pett Ridge's Mord Em'ly (1898). Often they are just plain silly, as Joseph Hocking's Mrs Price in All Men Are Liars (1891), who presents a Socialist society as a fairy tale where 'Everybody happy, and just a lovely time altogether'.12 Such fictional perspectives are supported by Beatrice Webb, who, though she became a Fabian Socialist herself, always felt uncomfortable with the collective image they created. In a record of a Socialist meeting she attended in 1896, she commented:

> The rank and file of socialists, especially English socialists, are unusually silly folk - for the most part feather-headed failures - and heaped together in one hall with the consciousness that their every word would be reported by the 'world press', they approached raving imbecility.13

The purpose of such portraits which acknowledged Socialists as a familiar part of the London scene but portrayed them as objects of ridicule and contempt, was unambiguous. More subtle are the integrative strategies such as those used by Mrs Humphry Ward in Marcella (1894), where the apparent theme - the growth of an independent and intelligent young woman Socialist - disguises an attack on Socialism as a misguided ideology parasitical on the ideals and aspirations of the young. Mrs Ward was interested in Socialism as a contemporary phenomenon, but dismissive of it as a serious political movement. In 1895, after attending a Social Democratic Federation meeting, she wrote:

> ...greatly interested, even touched. They talked nonsense, but most of them are good

fellows.14

In Marcella, this dismissiveness emerges as an issue of maturity. When Marcella gains an understanding of the moral stability and social awareness of the Tory landowner who loves her, Socialism loses its powerful but destabilising emotional appeal.

Several novelists attempted to move beyond a simple portrayal of Socialism in narrative or characterisation. They wrote about London in ways that materialised what they perceived as its political identity and in doing so suggested the potential for change. The creation of utopias provided one way to break out of the closedness of the slum realist tradition and to change reader expectations. William Morris chose this form for News From Nowhere (1890). So did Richard Whiteing for his first successful novel, The Island (1888). The utopia makes possible the construction of a social critique in several distinct ways. It enables the writer temporarily to achieve the impossible, that is, to find 'a realm of freedom' which is 'sheltered from the omnipresence of history and the implacable influence of the social'.15 In this way, the difficulties, ambiguities and inauthenticities set up by a political vision of a contemporary here and now are pre-empted. However, this does not imply that a utopia has nothing to do with reality. As Northrop Frye maintained in The Anatomy of Criticism:

> The quest - romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality. 16

The intrinsically personal nature of the utopia is an added strength, absorbing inconsistencies and possible reader scepticism. A considerable part of the charm of Morris' vision in News From Nowhere is that it was:

> ...neither a prophecy nor a promise, but the expression of a personal preference. Morris was saying 'Here is the sort of society I feel I should like to live in'.17

The same could be said of Richard Whiteing's vision of a pacific island idyll.

However, the novelists discussed in this chapter have been selected because they all chose to stay within the realist tradition and shared much literary common ground with their contemporaries. Nevertheless, they offer an illustration of Gustav Klaus' comment that:

> A form available at any given historical moment, and what an author with his or her individual project makes of it, can be two quite different things.18

Each novelist adopted a distinctly different approach to the materialisation of the political city. Margaret Harkness, considered in Chapter 2 for her contribution to the work of the slum novelists, must be reconsidered in this context. Constance Howell's A More Excellent Way (1888) carries forward and transforms the religious novel through the concept of intellectual evolution. Clementina Black's An Agitator (1894) draws on the world of Trade Unionism, and on her first hand knowledge of women's conditions of labour to establish a critique of London as a political centre.

Section 3

Margaret Harkness' distinctiveness was recognised in her own day. Her first novel, A City Girl, was published by Vizetelly, well known for its support of radical works. Out of Work was published by Swan, Sonneschein and Co. a publishing house with a similar reputation, whose lists during these vital years included Aveling's translation of Das Kapital (1887), Edward Carpenter's Towards Socialism (1883) and Sidney Webb's Socialism in England (1890). It was reprinted in 1890 by the Authors' Cooperative (which also brought out her later novel, A Manchester Shirtmaker) because of its success with working class readers. At the height of the debate about how to reach the working classes, at least one of Harkness' novels did just that. More recently, P.J. Keating assessed her novels, with Constance Howell's, as standing 'In ideological terms...completely apart from the mainstream of late-Victorian urban working-class fiction'.19

Harkness' novels received some contemporary critical acclaim. The Pall Mall Gazette, which under the editorship of W.T. Stead showed a positive, investigative spirit into poverty and social conditions, praised Harkness for her ability to bring a fresh approach to a well worked theme.20 Interestingly, this same reviewer considered her to be unduly critical of Socialists. More specifically The Morning Post recognised Out of Work as a valid comment, not just on the misery of the poor, but on the social structures that created poverty:

> One feels that such scenes (the unequal combat between a poor workman and the artificial circumstances of modern society) are constantly enacted near and around us, and it is impossible not to admire the generous efforts of writers such as Mr. Law, who devote their talents to bring to light such cruel social grievances.21

Her background as a parson's daughter, her experience in researching conditions of women's labour and working for the Salvation Army in the East End, and her links with some of the great Socialist thinkers of the time will certainly have contributed to the breadth and openmindedness of her perspective. She has fared less well in modern criticism where she has received comparatively little attention.22

Harkness adapted the realistic narrative form to her own purposes in two distinct ways. Both constitute a radical change in literary perspective. The first is that she abandons the traditional hero figure. Not only is Jos a working class man, but there is no middle class mediator or focus as there always is in Besant's and Gissing's novels.23 Jos stands alone, and it is his battle with the city of London that provides the narrative, but more importantly, reveals the deterministic and debilitating power of urban processes.

What Harkness makes clear in her portrayal of the relationship between London and Jos is that 'London' has two identities. There are the streets themselves, which have been allocated specific symbolic weightings. In broad terms these are the geographical, cultural and economic opposites of the East End and the West End, presented in the novels as fixed and immutable. Between them, like a fulcrum, is the

political space of Trafalgar Square, Westminster and the Embankment. It is here that Nelly collapses in tears, alone and frightened in A City Girl, and where Jos experiences the annihilation of self in Out of Work. In 1888 this was a territory of extremes, where the homeless down and outs and desperate unemployed encounter the police and the military. Although the narrative records the defeat of the historical moment, this is clearly territory which the established powers are having to defend. The potential for a different future outcome is held by the workman in the Trafalgar Square rally described in Out of Work. (See above p. 89) Although the narrative concentrates on depicting realistically what happens to Jos, it suggests that a new force is emerging which is too late to change Jos' fate but promises a future stake in the democratic territory of the 'Peoples' Square'.

London is also a collection of institutions, which appear immutable to the poor, unemployed man and woman who has to encounter them. This immutability is conveyed when they are referred to as buildings, and so become part of the concreteness of the London streets - The London Hospital, the Doss-House, the Police Court. Margaret Harkness breaks up this apparent fixity and reveals the actual tenuousness of their hold over consciousness. She draws attention to the unexpectedly subversive or kindly behaviour and thoughts that emerge against the trend. The East End doctor in Captain Lobe diverts the energy he might have given in Harley Street to smiling diplomacy, to research and the

compilation of data on the relationship between nutrition, crime and ill-health.24 In the same novel, the labour-mistress performs an unpleasant task as humanely as possible fighting for small concessions such as lunch break benches while in the evenings she struggles to find a political context for her instinctive responses. Similarly, the dock worker in Out of Work counters the prevailing model of an East End father to show his care and concern while struggling to relate the ideas of Socialism to his particular position. His conflicts and their relationship to the organisation of the demonstration in themselves exist at a different historical point from Jos' total oppression. These characters are not offered as lone individuals but as types as Harkness points out in a footnote to Captain Lobe. (CL 92)

The two daydream sequences in A City Girl have the same effect of defying the totality of social determinism. The first is triggered by Nelly's meeting with Arthur who fascinates her with his West End manners and speech. The 'bright star above the Mint' which she 'loved to watch' focuses her thoughts, as she tries to reach beyond what she knows. What in fact she thinks about are a series of images of the Buildings, the block where she lives. She imagines the babies, the men returning from the pub, the quarrels, the rent collectors. Interwoven with her images are thoughts of her responses and her desire to intervene - 'To spring out of bed and remonstrate'. (CG 49) The sequence ends with a return to the star and her memory of Arthur Grant. What

the sequence suggests is that each concrete image contains the shadow of another possibility, as yet undefined or understood:

> Whitechapel knows nothing of metempyschosis; it is the land of dumb thought and dumb feeling. (CG 93)

The point is emphasised when she tries to recapture Arthur's image in her mind and compares him with her former sweetheart:

> ...She saw him still in her inner consciousness, saw a tall fair man, with blue eyes and yellow moustache, very like George, yet very different. (CG 43)

Truth to the immediate reality of the situation reveals these individuals to be as trapped as anyone else, but their intimations of a different mode of consciousness are the flags for future changes.

Harkness' rejection of authorial authority, already discussed earlier, is also original. It was a courageous and unusual formal experiment. This stance is not typical of her later novels. In Captain Lobe and George Eastmont (1905) she returned to the more familiar formula of a middle class viewpoint, though in Captain Lobe this model is, nevertheless, radically changed. The characterisation of Captain Lobe offers a solution to the conflicting formal demands for an independent and authoritative agent, traditionally male, and an emotionally sensitive and responsive observer, traditionally female. Captain Lobe is the hero/ine. He has an unusually delicate man's body, a female sensibility and a consciousness specifically disclaimed as intellectual. The closing words of the novel record the labour-mistress' response:

> 'He quite upsets my theories about men,' she said to Ruth; 'but there! he isn't a man - he is a woman.' (CL 281)

In Margaret Harkness' novels, innovations might appear part of an almost inevitable process should a middle class writer with Socialist sympathies attempt to make a working class consciousness central to the text. Such assumptions ignore the fact that her approach presented formidable problems. If the author denies herself the right to provide an informing overview or to assume knowledge of the protagonist's voice, from where will the voice of the novel come? Harkness' answer is completely honest - to let the voice be the lack of voice. The silence of the working classes in what she described in a phrase quoted earlier as 'the land of dumb thought and dumb feeling' is a pervasive idea in all her novels, but it is in Out of Work that the idea is most sucessfully explored.

By refusing to identify her voice with that of the working classes, Margaret Harkness enabled the reader to witness the struggle of the working classes towards a consciousness of their position and an articulation of it. Unlike Besant, she does not assume that her language, or anyone else's, must be the language of the poor, nor that her awareness of the situation should be the awareness of those who are directly involved. In certain contexts the fictional effects are dramatic, as when the struggle by hundreds of men to read job advertisements in a public place is reported as 'The scramble took place in silence'. (OW 81) Again and again men are united in the solidarity of knowing

nothing can be said. In Victoria Park, the vigorous speeches of the men on the soap-boxes are commented on by the silence of the men 'glad to lie like logs on the ground'. (OW 47) In Trafalgar Square, the hundreds of homeless 'lay there quiet' (OW 168), and when Reeson and Jos meet there accidentally, their suffering is shared in a 'tramp up and down the square in strange, silent fashion slowly...'. (OW 17)

Within the novel's discourse Jos is silent:

> His attitude toward the public was one of silence; he listened to conversation, but seldom said more than 'yes' and 'no'. He could talk if he chose, in fact, he was sometimes surprised when he heard himself talking, for, like many uneducated men, he knew more than he was conscious of knowing; but he preferred to sit still and listen, to see and hear, and keep quiet. (OW 129)

Jos' understanding of his position is severely hampered by the lack of an appropriate language as he struggles to articulate his sense of injustice and his impotence in an unfamiliar and incomprehensible world: 'He could not say why it was wrong exactly; and he kept his thoughts to himself for he was a very silent man'. (OW 168) His deepest feelings l always below the surface of his consciousness, vague and undefined. His silent courtship of Polly is the pattern of all East End courting, but later he 'remembered how silent he was with Polly' and wonders about it. (OW 65) His separation from Squirrel is not the result of a rupturing of their friendship, but a failure of communication, a failure 'to interpret her silence'. (OW 187) When forced to speak, he falls back on cliché. 'There are too many of us poor folks, and not enough work for us to do' (OW 91), or the

formulae of board school education, as his letters to Polly reveal with their 'sentences...like moral precepts, copied from some children's lesson book.' (OW 224).

It is this sense of a deep well of thought, feeling and protest lying unexpressed that gives such power to the account of the unemployed rally in Chapter 15, when, after the first attack by the police, 'A low angry hiss was heard amongst the men', Sounds, forced by desperation and despair through the passivity of silence by the physical violence of the police, crescendo as the 'mob...moved like one man toward the square, and surged back, hissing'. Similarly, it underlines the pathos in the striking moment when the homeless are turned out of Trafalgar Square and kept on the move by police:

> All through one night a little band of fifty men and women walked up and down, outside the square, followed by two enormous policemen.
>
> 'We're a desperate lot,' said a small, sickly-looking individual. 'You'd best not anger us.'
>
> The policeman smiled at his impotence. (OW 178)

Magaret Harkness makes clear that the 'silence' of the working classes cannot be broken simply by means of education, as Besant had suggested. All the major characters in the novel, with the exception of Squirrel, are literate, and many of them are well read and fluent, but the language that education provides them with remains uncomfortably separate from the experiences that need articulation. The dock labourer is an example of a working man whose political consciousness is comprised of a motley of anti-monarchist and socialist ideas gathered from randon reading of books,

pamphlets and periodicals. This contact with political rhetoric has not contributed to the raising of his political consciousness. Rather the opposite, - he is embittered and inflexible. His reiteration of radical ideas has only proved their impotence. He and his wife are still starving. His 'metamorphosis' as witnessed by Jos when he sees the dock labourer with his baby indicates the duality of the workers' position. Their personal needs and values, and the experience of exploitation and degradation may be referred to, but not embodied in, the political rhetoric of contemporary radicals. A very similar portrait occurs in Captain Lobe. Jane Hardy, the labour-mistress, has strings of 'words and phrases such as 'emancipation', 'bloated aristocrat', 'white slavery', and 'the emanicipation of labour', dangle like charms before her eyes' but they only serve to make her unhappy. (CL 116) Her real strength emerges in her emotional solidarity with the factory girls she supervises.

Those hoping for an overt statement of Socialist convictions through narrative or characterisation will be disappointed by Margaret Harkness' novels. Her achievement was to recognise the importance of formal changes which would necessarily change the questions and open up the potential for new answers. The realism she demonstrates then is not simply that of the London scene in 1880s and its deterministic influence on consciousness, but that structures can be changed and, by analogy, the consciousness that they create.

Section 4

Constance Howell's A More Excellent Way was published in the same year and by the same publishers as Out of Work.25 The narrative spans a far greater length of time, moving from the marriage and emigration of Agatha Hathaway to the maturity her son, Otho, some thirty years later. It also spans three locations, India, Switzerland and London. Otho moves to London when his mother dies, and arrives to find it plunged in social turmoil. Constance Howell records the events of 1886, the various reactions to them and the roles of the Churches, upper classes and Socialist groups in supporting or suppressing them.

Constance Howell takes up a specifically Socialist perspective on her material which brought her some criticism in her own day.26 It is certainly true that the novel is formally less interesting and less innovative than Margaret Harkness' Out of Work.. What characterises it as 'Socialist' is partly narrative orientation but largely Socialist didacticism or polemic. When Otho becomes the hero figure in the second part of the novel, his development towards Socialism is followed through a series of political conversations, open air meetings and lectures. As such it gives valuable insights into a particular political viewpoint at the time, but little else.

On the whole although its subject matter identifies it with the vanguard of political thought in 1888, the traditional framework of a realistic narrative is never

seriously challenged. London carries a symbolic weight familiar from the religious novels. It marks the turning point of Otho's life. It is a ferment of ideas and full of the potential for change. It demands a response, and so becomes the ultimate test of character. Otho, the hero, is a well-to-do ex-colonial member of the middle classes, and it is his consciousness that forms the central focus of the novel's characterisation.

There are points of the novel where a Socialist orientation is sufficient to raise questions and broaden the possible range of sympathies available. Howell's account of the 1886 unemployment riots are a good example. Comparison with Mallock's account in The Old Order Changes highlights this.27 Both Mallock and Howell record events through the eye of an ignorant observer - both Otho and Carew have only been in London for a few hours after long periods abroad - and from the same viewpoint - the window of a gentlemen's club. Both tell of the movement of demonstrators through the West End. Carew rapidly joins his friends at the window and from that point the reader is allowed only the perspective of the upper middle classes. While the actual description of the demonstrators as 'discoloured and pitiable' with 'sullen and dull solidity' seem authentic enough, the metaphors appear more than a little inappropriate. They moved 'like some great volume of semi-liquid sewage'. They were 'perpetually frothing against the sides of shops'. They were 'this hoarse and horrible inundation'. Mallock then describes an unprovoked attack on the club opposite which is

attributed to the personal spite of their leader Foreman.

Otho on the other hand, watches the crowd from the window, but then he retreats to a corner, where he observes instead the responses of the fellow members of his class. This simple distancing device gives an overview of the social conflict:

> Affluent and poor looked at each other, and knew not they were brothers. It was a meeting of the haves and the have-nots; there were evil passions on both sides, but one side had excuse and the other none. (MEW 116)

Howell also brings the violence of the attack into closer focus. Otho witnesses his acquaintances insult the crowd and their abject fear when the last barrier between themselves and the unemployed is threatened. Both passages are propagandist, but Howell offers at best some semblance of narrative detachment; at least an alternative version of interpretations and responses.

There are, however, some significant ways in which Howell's novel carries indications of a constructive clash between ideology and form. Her picture of London for instance differs in three fundamental ways from other writers. The sense of London as a place rapidly gives way to London as process. The city as a physical structure is demystified, its power invested instead in its citizens. People have the power to choose, and the numerous meetings and demonstrations that take place all point to the fact that people can change and therefore that history can move forward.

Another aspect of the controlled rather than the

controlling city is explored through movement around it. Unlike the imprisoned Thyrza, or the questioning Edward Strahan or the frenetic Monica, Otho moves purposefully and freely in and out of London, backwards and forwards across boundaries and zones. His movements are dictated by his new political purpose which has the power and determination to override the city's traditional identity.

However, Howell's most successful image of London is that of a city at a specific point in the evolutionary chronology of the human consciousness. Howell demonstrates a Marxist perspective on history where Capitalism is the last stage before the inevitable culmination in Socialism, and where Socialism is understood to be a completion of man's development. Unlike her rather heavy handed expositions of the more specific contemporary arguments about poverty, unemployment and class conflict, Howell organises her text more effectively to indicate its central premise - the evolutionary process towards betterment.

The narrative is constructed in three stages which are differentiated both by location and generation: the first is set in India in the grip of a British ethical and class culture which is cynically exploitative of its power. Here Agatha and Adrian are a young married couple with their first son in the mid 1850s. The second is an interim period of transition in which the right to change and progress is established. It is set in Spain and witnesses the handing over of responsibility by the ageing Agatha to her son, Otho. The third is set in London where Otho's own

independent development begins and where the future is located.

The relationships between Adrian Hathaway and his wife, and later between Otho and his mother, provide the channel for intellectual evolution. Adrian Hathaway is an atheist, but he supports Christianity as an effective means of social control:

> 'The clergy are their (the police's) valuable auxiliaries...And every Government knows that. Church and State go together.' (MEW 18)

Agatha, on the other hand, is a confirmed atheist. She sees atheism as the first step of reaction against a capitalist society and as such a vital part of the class war - a view often voiced during and after the Bradlaugh campaign. A More Excellent Way is unusual in novels of this period in its rejecton of Christ himself, not just as outmoded, but as wrong. He is seen as a 'spiritless and incomplete character' (MEW 153), and '...so weak as to have touched the verge of insanity'. (MEW 59) Mrs Hathaway constantly emphasises how ideas will change. When she is dying she explains that her own convictions about atheism are only a stage along the way to intellectual freedom. She tells Otho:

> 'New ideas will arise, and you must take them up and carry them forward. It is only in this way that the world can be saved.' (MEW 107)

Otho accepts this role, and free of Christian and class assumptions is open to new ideas and perceptions. It is from this consciousness that he moves towards Socialism.

The fears that heredity can perpetuate society's ills are

here transformed from a negative genetic process to a positive intellectual one. Agatha is prepared to wait until after her husband's death before she campaigns openly for Atheism. She chooses to live quietly in Spain because she feels that England is not yet ready for her ideas. She cannot share them with Otho until he is a man for fear of his being removed from her. Yet these years are perceived as a necessary gestation period in the evolutionary cycle.

London is the city which facilitates Otho's enlightenment. Its exposure to Atheism has broken down the hold of Christianity. The class struggle has begun to emerge in its political colours and it is this political relationship between environment and citizens that Howell suggests through Otho's first perceptions of London when he arrives at London Docks. (MEW 112-114) He recognises that London will become the world stage for the establishment of Socialism. Howell does not betray her evolutionary theory by allowing Otho's initial enthusiasm to dictate an utopian ending. The ending is, in fact, decidedly muted. The education process will be slow; revolution is still in the future, and Otho realises that preparation will play an essential part in building a Socialist Millenium.

Section 5

Clementina Black's background and early experience was remarkably similar to that of Margaret Harkness. Her writing

career began early but her political interests were not stirred until the events of 1886. It was at this point that she began to research questions of women's labour and to decide her political affiliations. In the late eighties she was a member of the Fabian Society. Though 'a Socialist at heart', by 1892 she had rejected Marxism since she disagreed with the economic determinism propounded by Das Kapital.28 She also rejected the State Socialism that fellow Fabians Beatrice and Sidney Webb increasingly advocated. Clementina Black's Socialism appears to tread the now familiar path where the political activity brought to bear on economic structures was largely motivated by compassion and justice. In the words of a contemporary:

> ...it was with the earnest and serious-minded body of men and women, who neither wasted their time in mere denunciation of the status quo on the one side, nor indulged in dreams of false security on the other, that Miss Black threw in her lot.29

In 1889 she helped to found the Women's Trade Union Association in response to the new political awareness created by the Match Girls' Strike. Later, in 1894, the Women's Industrial Council was formed to make a 'special and systematic enquiry into the conditions of working women' as Clementina Black explained at the inaugural meeting.30 From them on, until 1915 when the results of the inquiry were published, Black was deeply concerned with and widely informed about women's working conditions. Numerous articles written during this period also indicate that she continued to be active in calling for the organisation of women while undertaking the inquiry.31

Clementina Black had begun writing fiction in her early twenties. Her nephew, David Garnett, remembered that:

> I had always enjoyed Clementina's novels, though they are constructed upon the traditional pattern of the tom-boy damsel in distress and travellers upon the Dover Road. 32

In fact there was at least one novel in which she attempted, with some success, to create something very different. That novel was An Agitator (1894).33

An Agitator attacks the mystification and romanticisation of Socialism and of social problems such as poverty and unemployment. However, Black is not always successful in jettisoning the literary furniture that accompanies and hampers the expression of her ideas. Even so, in the first half of the novel, she does succeed in disengaging the connection between daily struggle and spiritual quest; between leadership and heroism; between material environment and symbolic networks.

This is achieved partially through the material she selects to explore her ideas. She centres Trade Union activity as the focus for her narrative and characters. This choice was unusual in itself. It removed the emphasis from Socialism as an ideology, that is as a framework of ideas instrumental to social change, to Socialism as practice. The first half of An Agitator is set during an industrial dispute and explores the relationship between employers and workers, and the conflicts between workers themselves in dealing with such confrontations. Such an emphasis was no doubt partly due to the shift in political emphasis in the

mid 1890s. While Out of Work and A More Excellent Way were both published in 1888 and were themselves part of the contemporary social and political disturbances, An Agitator was written several years after, when the lessons of the Match Girls' Strike and the Great Dock Strike had been learned and translated, in organisational terms, into the New Unionism. The intervening years had made possible a very different perspective.

Yet Black still faced similar problems to her predecessors in creating a realistic narrative of working class life and conditions - those of viewpoint and voice. Like Harkness and Howell before her, she uses distance, but unlike them, she uses distance from London itself to provide the necessary perspective. However, the oppositional stance of Mudford where the opening of the novel is located, only becomes fully evident in the second half of An Agitator. The world of the opening chapters is complete in itself. This is not to say that Black simply denies the significance of London and its role as a catalyst and a centre of power. Brand is eventually drawn to London and the second half of the novel is located there. The point is that in first establishing the credibility of another language and class, London is then interpreted from that perspective. Within the terms of the class struggle it becomes a relational city, not a total world.

Black also tackled the problem of voice with an originality that sets this novel apart from others with similar themes. She made her central character an

intelligent, articulate working class Trade Union activist. The title of the novel and the hero's name show her truthfulness to Engels' theory of literary types. Brand is 'an' agitator - his distinctivenesss is in his historical role and dilemma, rather than his actions and achievements. She drew on her wide knowledge of labour conditions and unionisation to provide the language and substance of Brand's conversations. Historically speaking Brand is the successor of Harkness' worker who springs up in Trafalgar Square to display his tools. It is this potential for a working class voice established through the value of labour that Black enables to be partially fulfilled in An Agitator.

It is worth looking in detail at how this is achieved in the early chapters of the novel. The opening sentence locates the time and action specifically in a strike for better hours. This enables the language of Socialism and the mode of consciousness that informs it to be released naturally. Black works on an assumption of reader familiarity with vocabulary such as 'blacklegs', 'strike pay', 'in the shop', and Union practices such as negotiating rights, committee elections and strike pay distribution. Any sense of an alienating jargon is removed, because this is not an oppositional voice but the predominant one. Mudford is seen as fighting an important battle to which the concerns of London are subordinate.

This world is portrayed as complete to itself in other ways. It has its own hierarchy and its own value system with all the conflicts that that implies. Workers hector each

other, disagree with each other and display differing levels of consciousness about their roles. Brand is the disinterested focus of working class union morality - hard work, comradely solidarity, and self-respect. It is a world engaged upon the development of its own history. This is demonstrated by Wilkins, one of the delegates to the Director, when he argues for compromise and 'a quiet life' (AA 24), and is supported by Burton who maintains that 'the wire-workers want a wire-worker for secretary, and not an engineer'. (AA 25) The reader is aware that the terms of such a conflict will determine the nature of a working class future.

The class implications are twofold. Wilkins is described as:

> ...a small man with a narrow, ferret face, and with the appearance and manner which police-court reporters call respectable. (AA 22)

A worker who cannot be trusted by his fellow workers is seen to be acceptable in the language of bourgeois rhetoric. This idea of 'respectability' is picked up later in Brand's court case where the two rhetorics are opposed in assessing Brand's honesty. On the other hand Oliver Pelham, from a wealthy and educated background, is sympathetic and supportive of the strikers' cause. However, he recognises that his class prevents him from having a valid role in their struggle:

> I have never toiled with my hands, never tramped in search of work, never known what it was to come to my last shilling. My thought, my words, my way of seeing things are all just a little different - and they

(the strikers) distrust me. (AA 35)

He accepts that consciousness is a social product, and that it is Brand's privilege to be working class and in a position to help the cause directly. However, the juxtapositon of the two types - the working class traitor and the middle class sympathiser - also reveals Socialism as an ideology whose future development may not lie in any simple way in the confrontation of immutably defined classes.

The oppositional voice in the text is that of the forces of the establishment rather than the reverse. The Church's opposition is expressed through the slum priest who is supporting the strike, relaying his vicar's warning not to 'drag the Chuch through the mud'. (AA 16) The unreliability of the Press, a point to be emphasised throughout the novel, makes it an uncertain ally, prepared to support or to criticise according to commercial considerations. The Directors indicate their fear of the power of the Union by attempting to undermine the unity of its members.

To create these assumptions Black uses an artificially constricted geography (the committee rooms, the Pelham's house); chronology (the immediate present); social networks (those who are Socialists) and activities (events connected with the strike and the Labour Movement). Later in the novel, when Brand moves to London to confront broader cultural and political positions, the validity and integrity of his mode of consciousness has been established. This is

highlighted in Brand's encounter with the Russell Square Socialists. This represents a shift not only to the theoretical platform appropriated by the middle classes but to seeing working class concerns transformed into middle class hobbies, career opportunities and journalistic copy. London Socialism is shot through with arrogant misconceptions. It claims to 'voice the inarticulate aspirations of the toiling masses of this great city' (AA 49), and to have the right to leadership since '...in English politics the victory is always to the middle class.' (AA 53).

The political naivety of London Socialists is compounded by the London press for whom the contemporary interest in Socialism provides endless fictions. Out of Brand, the press creates the character the public wants and is prepared to rewrite history to get it. The Meteor article demonstrates the building of a myth which will transform Brand from a working class agitator to a desirable hero-figure, much as we have already observed in the building of the Father Jay myth. The journalist plans to include 'touching anecdotes of...juvenile precocity and daring', reports on his 'loveable disposition ' and his courage in rescuing 'two children from a conflagration in South London'. More insidiously, the reporter reveals his integrative purposes when he says:

> 'If we go on on long enough telling the public he's amiable, they'll end by believing it, and he may even come to believe it himself, and act up to it.' (AA 41)

Clementina Black's portrayal of London, like Constance

Howell's, differs fundamentally from those of her contemporaries. Although the historical seats of power - Parliament and the Press - are located there, it contains no force for the future. It plays games with changes that never actually happen. Its Socialists flaunt a mere intellectual facade; its Tories fail to see the significance of the Labour vote; its Liberals court it only for Party self-interest. The implication is that it is with the working classes in the regions that the possibility for change resides. The power represented by London and the middle and upper classes with whom Black identifies it, is on the wane - its degeneration demonstrated through the action of Sir Warwick and by the unreal formalities of its governing procedures. London in fact represents the integrative process at its most naked. Brand is finally disarmed by an invitation to stand for Parliament which he accepts, though his reputation is later ruined by allegations of vote-rigging.

Despite Clementina Black's considerable achievement in An Agitator, the formal strains within the text finally detract from its success. One of the problems she appears not to resolve is how a working class hero can be seen to succeed. It may have been to compensate for this uncertainty that she introduced a secondary narrative thread which establishes a second identity for Brand. In this sub-plot Brand's parentage is questioned, an unexpected letter is produced, and he is faced with the dilemma of whether to acknowledge his aristocratic parentage. His success is

finally measured in personal terms, in his discovery of the moral value of his work in a long prison sequence that, disappointingly, is barely related to the earlier part of the novel.

It is tempting to offer another explanation for Black's apparent failure to free herself completely from a traditional romantic framework. Her experience of labour politics was based on women's work and women's attempts at union organisation. In a contemporary article she is recognised as one of:

> ...two women who, when the history of the present labour movement comes to be written, will be recognised as the chief motors in the work of promoting union among women-workers. 34

It is not surprising then, that Brand's long speech to the Russell Square Socialists draws for its examples entirely on issues concerned with women's labour. Yet if Black was to create a realistic world she was unable to use a woman as the agitator. It was some time before working class women union activists were to emerge.35 In fact, opportunities for political influence were few for women of any class as Mrs Pelham's comment within the text illustrates:

> ...she (woman) is shut out from helping at the point where she sees that help is most wanted. If I were one of my own brothers, I could have got into the House of Commons pretty easily. That's the place where you want soldiers to stand for Labour, and I, who would do it and could do it, am shut out. (AA 75)

Had Clementina Black been able to centre the action of her novel on a woman, she would possibly have been less constrained by traditional expectations. As it was she had

to portray an unfamiliar aspect of contemporary consciousness through the tradition of the male hero. Conscious as she was of the distortions and fictions produced by the press as a substitute for a real working class identity, she was herself unable to avoid them.

Section 5

Novelists who wished to bring a political and materialist perspective to social problems within the realist tradition faced considerable problems. The first was the obverse of those faced by the Christian Socialist novelists. Religious writers were drawing on a realistic tradition and reinterpreting spiritual aspirations through their account of the city. This concern clearly differentiated their approach from the work of the slum realists. Political writers also had to seek differentiation from the slum realists, but they needed to construct an urban realism which not only evoked the reality of social surfaces but which also revealed the underlying causes for them. Those writers who continued to work with the realist tradition needed to seek adaptations of that form which would contest and undermine the value system they sought to criticise. If they were to realise London as a political construct that could be the manifestation of capitalism today and of Socialism tomorrow, they needed to disable preconceptions and enable readers to perceive London as a

stage in the evolution of social consciousness

Further considerations are raised in The Socialist Novel in Britain. Gustav Klaus discusses the problem of presenting fully the awfulness of the contemporary situation while still offering some hope of control and change. In 'Chartist Fiction and the Development of a Class-Based Literature' Martha Vicinus considers the associated problem of writing a narrative that is 'simply meant to arouse and reinforce their [the readers] already existing anger'.36 Engels considered Margaret Harkness to have fallen foul of the first of these difficulties. In his well known criticism of Out of Work, he disqualified it from having any status as a Socialist novel because it portrayed despair and negated the possibility of change.37 Other novelists inadvertently fell foul of the second. Realistic description has the power to act on readers in a way that can simply arouse conditioned responses which could prejudice their reading - a problem Gissing encountered in readers of his early slum novels, and particularly The Nether World.

In their novels, Harkness, Howell and Black attempted to overcome these difficulties and to present Socialism in a way that gave it oppositional space and integrity. They created images of London which questioned existing values in such as way as to imply the possibility of a Socialist resolution. All the social problem novelists of the 1880s and 1890s drew on similar material, but Harkness, Black and Howell used that material to formulate different questions. It is their considerable achievement that they encourage readers to ask:

> ... what is the nature of the orientation - or intonation - of <u>this</u> manner of speaking history? 38

and that they suggest, in their very different ways, an answer located in the barrenness of contemporary religious and political discourse for the articulation of a working class identity and a Socialist future.

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APPENDIX

Charles Booth, Labour and Life of the People. London (East) 2 (London, 1891) pp. 128-129

Marshall Street. This street is a murky combination of business and poverty. It runs parallel to a great leading thoroughfare, and the distance is not so great but that some establishments in the main street extend rear-wards so as to have a back entrance in Marshall Street. Where this is not the case, it is probable that the backs of the houses are closely built up, for space here is very valuable. A casual passer-by would not suppose that the residents in a few houses on one side only of this street would yield a list so long as that which follows:—

No.		Rms.	Pers.			
64	kitchen	1	1	(B)	Widow (alone).	Very poor.
	gr. front	1	6	(B)	Widow and 5 children.	2 boys earn 11*s*. A great struggle.
	gr. back	1	3	(D)	Widow and 2 boys.	Makes cheap portmanteaus. 2 boys help.
	1st front	1	5	(B)	Young couple and 3 children.	Man often out of work.
	back	1	4	(B)	Man, wife, and 2 children.	Man often out of work. Bad health.
	2nd front	1	8	(B)	Man, wife, and 6 children.	Jew tailor, nearly blind. Wife does button holes. Very poor.
	back	1			New-comers.	No information.
	3rd front	1			New-comers.	No information.
	back	1	1	(B)	Old man (alone).	Helped by a married son.
63	ground	2			Landlord's office.	
	1st front	1	3	(B)	Man, wife, and 1 daughter.	Man casual porter. Girl about 18. Very poor.
	back	1			No particulars.	
	2nd front	1	2	(B)	Man and wife.	Casual porter. Wife receives charity.
	back	1	1	(B)	Very old woman (alone).	Does a little washing, and has 2*s* 6*d* out-relief.
61 and 62		Business premises.				
60	kitchen	1	1	(B)	Widow (alone).	Does occasional jobs.
	gr. front	1	3	(B)	Widow and 2 daughters.	Bad health. 1 girl grown up. 1 at school.
	back	1			New-comers.	
	1st front	1	3	(E)	Man, wife, and 1 daughter.	Regular market porter. Daughter at business.
	back	1	8	(B)	Man, wife, and 6 children.	Bargee. Irregular work. Wife chars occasionally. Quite poor. 2 more children away.
	2nd front	1	4	(D)	Widow and 3 sons.	Kept by her sons, 2 of whom are at work.
	back	1	3	(D)	Widower and two boys.	Both boys at school. Room very dirty.
59	gr. front	1	2	(E)	Widower and 1 son.	Bootmaker, and son in post-office.
	gr. back	1				Workshop to 2nd floor back.

No.		Rms.	Pers.			
	1st front	1	5		Man, wife, and 3 children.	New-comers.
	1st back	Business premises. Workshop to 2nd floor back.				
	2nd back	1	2	(E)	Man and grown-up daughter.	Works on own account, and collects rents. Comfortable.
58	gr. front	1	7	(D)	Man, wife, and 5 children.	Bootmaker. One girl, a daily servant.
	gr. back	1	1	(B)	Widow (old).	Washing. Assisted by Church.
	1st floor	1	6	(E)	Man, wife, and 4 children.	Takes rents of houses. 2 at work. Comfortable.
	2nd ,,	1	5	(C)	Man, wife, and 3 children.	Carpenter. Very bad health. Poor.
	2nd ,,	1	2	(B)	Man and wife.	Old and blind. Helped by City Company.
	3rd ,,	1	1	(C)	Widow.	Goes out to work.
	3rd back	1	1		Man.	Single labourer.
57 to 54	Business premises, &c.					
53	gr. floor (1)	1	4	(D)	Widow, grown son, 2 children.	Widow in hospital with cancer. Son removes furniture.
	gr. floor (2)	1	2	(B)	Man and wife.	Old, bedridden. Rent paid by a gentleman. Wife charing.
	1st ,,	2	7	(E)	Man, wife, and 5 children.	Tailor. Good work. 3 children left school. 1 pupil teacher at R. C. school. Decent.
	2nd ,,	1	3		Man, wife, and young child.	New-comers.
	2nd ,,	1	4	(E)	Man, wife, and 2 children.	Clerk. Comfortable.
	3rd ,,	1	6	(D)	Man, wife, and 4 children.	Tailor, elderly. Seem comfortable.
	3rd ,,	1	6	(C)	Man, wife, and several children.	Painter. 2 boys at work.
52	gr. ,,	1	1	(D)	Widow.	Milk shop. Curtains off part of shop and sleeps there.
	gr. ,,	1	1		Man.	Sweet shop. Italian. Sleeps elsewhere.
	1st ,,	1				No particulars.
	2nd ,,	empty.				
	2nd ,,	1	2	(D)	Man and wife.	Both work.
	2nd ,,	1	8	(B)	Man and wife, lot of children.	Boot repairer. Very poor.
	3rd ,,	1	7	(B)	Wife and 6 children.	Husband lunatic, at Colney Hatch. Wife chars and waits at a club. Boy and girl at work. 2 at school. 2 quite young.
	3rd ,,	1	7	(B)	Man, wife, and 5 children.	Boot repairer. Irregular work. Brother of man below.

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